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FANTINE AVENTI

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FANTINE AVENEL

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BY

LUCIE LACOSTE

Author of Miminetta, etc.



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TO PAUL
MY SON

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FANTINE AVENEL

FANTINE AVENEL

CHAPTER I.

Unrolling beneath Richard Stanborn's car like a wide gray ribbon, the road from Long Beach rapidly faded behind them,—the girl silent and happy, thrilled with pleasure as they sped back to New York.

Richard shifted momentarily his glance from the road ahead and appraisingly took in the girl beside him; her delicate profile framed by a cheap Panama hat; her slim neck curving from a soft silk blouse; her dainty feet poised carelessly on the nickle-plated footrest.

The purity of her features was accentuated by the unstudied effect of her costume.

Having formed the conclusion, "She's a thoroughbred," young Stanborn turned his attention once more to the road.

The girl, conscious of his appraisal, laughingly inquired:

"What is it?"

"Tell me your name!" this request came almost abruptly.

"It would mean nothing to you," she answered. "We met by chance. You offered to take me back to New York. We're almost there and when we get to the end of the bridge we will have to part—and say good-bye. You know you promised! You said you wouldn't question or try to follow me."

Richard looked at her steadily for a moment.

"And if I refuse to keep my promise?" he persisted.

The girl's features clouded,—for a moment she remained silent, then,—as if she had cleared this point in her mind, she made the brief answer:

"You won't!"

"Why?" he inquired, now thoroughly interested. It seemed to him as if he had a right to question her.

"Well, because—because you won't!"

"Now bother! A fellow can't plead a case with a girl and drive a forty-horsepower car at the same time,—but still, you see,—I have

a confession to make. I saw you long before you saw me."

She betrayed her surprise.

"When? At the station?"

"No, at the beach."

"Oh!"

"Luck was with me when I caught up to you at the station."

"Then it was not accidental?" she interrupted him hurriedly.

"What," Richard laughed, "your missing the Long Beach train for New York?"

"No. Your offering to help me out."

She fixed her attention steadily on the road that seemed to disappear with such speed under the flying car.

"I have to own up. I told you I was going to make a confession. I did see you first. I did want to meet you. And when I happened to—as it were—run upon you at the railroad station,——"

"I am sorry," she interrupted him again. Then, as if trying to explain why she had jumped into his car so readily, she continued:

"I had to be in New York by five, and there was no other train until 6:30, and——"

"And I looked perfectly harmless?" Here he laughed boyishly.

"Oh, I never looked at you!" She gave him a hurried glance out of the corners of her eyes and went on,—

"I only saw the car. I couldn't resist,—but if you are going to torment me I'll——"

"Pardon me!" Richard's voice expressed his sincerity. "I won't bother you,—have it your way. That's settled. Let's enjoy the few last minutes left of our romantic ride."

The warm September sunshine glowed passionately about them; the sky was pure blue and the whole atmosphere seemed to vibrate with the marvelous warmth of the first days of coming Autumn.

Richard sensed the departing thrill of life that touched the few trees in sight with a crimson flush, a yellow glow. Suddenly he turned his head again and looked at the girl sitting quietly beside him. What a remarkable spirit of independence she seemed to radiate! Where had she acquired this self-reliance?

He decided to ask no further questions, but almost as he did so he heard himself speaking the words:

“I can’t top a confession with a second confession, but you interest me. Do you love the sea?”

The girl looked at him fully.

Richard felt a gentle warmth steal through his being as he glanced for half a second into her wide open eyes. He became positive of one thing:—her eyes were remarkable;—he wanted to mention them;—they were alight with intelligence, a certain something, a reckless daring, courage, depth,—depth that he could only have described as part of the sea.

She turned her profile to him once more and answered quietly:

“Oh, yes, I adore the sea! I love to get beyond the breakers, to swim away from shore and forget that I have to swim back.”

“I passed you when you were swimming out in the ocean. What a steady little stroke you have in the water! Just like a boy’s! I followed you for a while, then I swam back to the shore, sat on the sand, and waited. Where did you learn to swim?”

"In the river." The girl meant the East River, but young Stanborn misunderstood her.

"Oh, then, you don't come from New York?"

"Indeed I do!" There was no mistaking the pride with which she affirmed this, even if the bit of New York she was familiar with was only the lower East Side.

"But then, how is it I haven't seen you during the summer at Long Beach?"

"It's too far from home. Besides, it costs a lot of money to go there."

Richard laughed, enchanted by her naivete.

"When will you be eighteen?" he questioned.

"Next January!" she laughed.

Richard lapsed into silence. His mind wandered back to his own elite circle. He recalled the girls he had mingled with since boyhood; well guarded, protected young ladies cherished by ambitious mothers who stifled their daughters' individuality by conventions more deadly to beauty and freedom than is the forced drill to a soldier. He won-

dered what one woman he knew would forfeit to duplicate in Muriel, her daughter, the natural charm of straightforward simplicity and unspoiled nature such as this girl sitting beside him projected. He smiled when he recalled her spontaneous acceptance of his invitation to ride back to New York, and it was this unpremeditated freedom of action on her part without embarrassment or forethought that both delighted and interested him.

The girl interrupted his thoughts; the sound of her voice reached him above the smooth purr of the motor.

“What has made you so silent?”

“It’s all so absurd! You set the wheels of my mind to thinking. You see, I wonder what my old man, the Governor, would say if—well, if he were to meet you?”

“There is no danger of that.” She spoke wistfully.

Richard became thoughtful once more. What was there about her that so interested him, sole heir to the Stanborn estate? He really did not like to talk to girls; girls who on the very first meeting chatted endlessly.

of themselves, until he was always glad to get away. But here was a new specimen,—a shop girl, probably, or perhaps a stenographer,—something like that,—refusing to tell him her name and, what piqued his vanity more, she didn't show enough interest to question his. He wanted to find out all about her, but there ahead of them loomed the 59th Street Bridge.

He slowed his car almost to a halt as he approached the huge structure, tremendous in its modern achievement which did away with the old nuisance of ferryboats and annihilated distances above water. The girl sitting beside him moved gently, slightly brushing his shoulder with her own as she did so.

"We're on the bridge! Now we must start to say goodbye!" she exclaimed.

Vividly-painted trucks passed them with their careless drivers going as fast as the law would allow. Motor cars glided past them silently. A driver on a grocery wagon whipped his horse in an effort to hasten his speed and break him in line before an impatiently puffing racer. Their car was almost at a standstill.

"I wonder," he asked, what power led me this morning to go for just one more swim? You see I am driving slower than I should, but I am daring Fate,—for we must part. The last minutes are the rarest. What was it that Bill Shakespeare said?—'Parting is such sweet sorrow!' He should have seen you."

She started slightly, then in embarrassment cut him short.

"That's too silly!"

They had neared the Manhattan end of the bridge. A traffic policeman raised his hand and blew a whistle. The street cars stopped and started; the elevated roared above, people crossed the thoroughfare in swarms.

The girl rose from her seat quickly and jumped out of the racer on to the street. She seemed smaller to him as she stood there, her big sea-colored eyes, shadowed by double rows of long lashes, looking up at him; her slender, supple body showing control of every muscle. Involuntarily he stretched out his hand to take hers in a parting grasp.

"Tell me your name?" impulsively he asked once more.

Ignoring his question, she drew back her head hurriedly and with a quick, decisive turn of her head looked away from him; then back to him with an illuminated smile.

"Wait, I'll put you safe over!" he said, as she halted to gain a clear passage.

"Thank you, I can get across the avenue alone."

She gave him a parting smile.

An impulse which he could not resist possessed Richard. In a flash he took out of his pocket a small Kodak and before she was aware of the fact he had snapped a likeness of her as she stood smiling there, in the last ray of the setting sun, amidst the traffic that surged about her.

"Well, if you won't tell me your name, I have a picture of you anyway," he called after her.

And that was all. She had disappeared, lost herself, as it were, amidst the moving vehicles.

Richard was unable to fathom why he sensed a loss with her departure. He put out

his hand and meditatively touched the rear of the seat where her back had rested. He caught himself up suddenly as the gruff voice of a darkly-uniformed policeman broke his momentary reverie with a command:

"Hey, there! What's the idea—blocking the traffic?"

"Sorry," Richard answered, as he put his foot on the accelerator and released the clutch.

"Get along!" Next time it's a fine!" the policeman warned him as he passed down Third Avenue.

Above him, outlined in the glow of the setting sun that somehow managed to find its way through the shafts of shadow cast by the city buildings, the girl leaned over the railing of the elevated stairway and watched him go by.

She turned and ran lightly to the higher platform and boarded the downtown train, sinking into insignificance,—swallowed up in the current of the crowd.

There was nothing in the slight, boyish figure, clad in its dark blue skirt and white blouse, to attract particular attention—noth-

ing except her eyes,—eyes that held at once a rare warmth and depth of feeling, a vivid glow of magnetism, fearlessness and a vibrant joy of life in their sea-green-blue depths. Even the most casual observer was compelled to pause and take a second look at her eyes, but a student of psychology could have discovered in them a world of research.

The girl finally obtained a seat, relaxed and contentedly settled herself as well as the overcrowded condition of the car would permit.

A baby cried. She managed to locate the sound by craning her neck and looking around a man hanging on a strap in front of her. Across the aisle a woman was endeavoring to quiet a little boy clinging to her skirt, and a baby struggling restlessly in her arms. The girl wanted to get up and help the woman but a laborer so crowded her that she could not move. Finally she gave the man a sharp push with her knees and he moved forward.

By this time, however, the woman had risen and was dragging herself out of the

car with the burden of motherhood weighing heavily upon her. The girl sighed and sat back, wondering if mothers ever found time to smile at anything except their children's pleasure. Then her thoughts reverted to her own past pleasure, her glorious ride in an uncrowded racer. She recalled the life-filled breath of the sea, the steady, smooth pace of the young fellow's car,—he had seemed so interested in her. She laughed to herself.

A man next to her lowered his paper, surprised to hear her laugh. It was a sound rarely heard in a crowded car. The girl caught his look and regained her composure.

He noticed the long shadows on her cheeks cast by the lashes as she lowered her eyes and he felt that she was alien to her cramped position. He moved to allow her more room.

Quickly she jumped up as the conductor called out in an unintelligible voice the street, and hurrying out of the car she descended the steps of the East First Street Station. Soon she turned the corner and skipped lightly along the littered sidewalk of East Third Street.

Twilight was closing in. Music from a rattling piano in a near basement mingled itself with the roar of the elevated train above her; her feet caught the melody and unconsciously her body swung into its rhythm as she hastened along. Suddenly she felt her arm grabbed. Startled, she freed herself from the grasp and, turning around, looked into the brutal face of a man, who, concealed in the swinging door of a corner cafe, had been watching her approach.

Shoving his cap over his eyes and concealing their mean, blue light, he accosted her angrily:

“Cut out your nonsense, Fantine Av-enel!”

He brought his face closer to her and protruded his heavy jaw, almost breathing in her ear as he spoke:

“Don’t you dare give us the slip tonight!”

Fantine drew herself up disdainfully.

“You never improve in your manners, do you, Handsome Mike?”

The man bristled with real resentment at the use of this nickname, which had been bestowed upon him by the members of his gang

in keen appreciation of his distorted countenance.

"Aw, go on! What good is a girl to a gang, anyway?" broke from his angry lips.

"Good enough to climb in a window when you're afraid to!" she retorted, as she stooped in an attitude of mock courtesy.

"Lis'en here! You weren't workin' at the pawn-shop today! And you'd better——"

His hand darted out to grasp her again but by this time Fantine had dodged out of his reach. He called after her doggedly:

"You'll get it! Guerre'll be after you!"

But Fantine did not hear him. Already she had skipped up the steps of an uninviting house and flitted past the dirty doorway.

Handsome Mike swung about abruptly and retraced his steps to the cafe, knowing himself to be the pettiest thief of the gang, but silently swearing to double on his ventures and show the girl the stuff he was made of.

The ill-kept hall which Fantine entered was partly lit by a flickering gas flame. It revealed the falling plaster and greasy spotted walls even in the subdued light. She

ran up the rickety stairway to the second floor and opened the door of a rear room.

It was one of those ill-ventilated, dark rooms of tenement houses usual in New York's lower East Side. The two rear windows faced a narrow courtyard but the distressing view was concealed by carefully drawn, spotless white curtains. The furniture was poor and meagre but the room was scrupulously clean, in fact its individual effort at cleanliness seemed almost a reproach in its sharp contrast to the filth of the neighborhood.

The odor of cooking greeted her as she closed the door.

A gentle looking woman turned from the table over which she was busily spreading a red damask cloth, and, smiling sweetly, spoke in French:

"You're home early, Fantine."

"It smells good, mother. I'm hungry." Fantine ran over and impulsively hugged her mother, who turned and placed two plates on the table.

Then placidly Rosalie Avenel returned the caress.

Fantine threw her Panama hat on the floor and hummed a few random notes of a song as she whirled a chair up to the table.

Going over to the stove, Rosalie filled a deep dish with hot stew, which she carefully brought over to the table. Fantine ate in silence while Rosalie stood watching her. Finally she raised her eyes and looked into the worried but tender face of her mother.

Immediately the girl knew that something was being kept from her, for the dark eyes into which she looked were clouded and the lines around the mouth were drawn firmly.

At thirty-eight Rosalie Avenel was still a good-looking woman, although her face showed traces of intense suffering. Her brilliant black eyes had remained wells of honesty. She wore her black hair combed straight from her forehead, revealing a brow which showed nobility of thought and purpose. Rosalie's solicitous manner revealed the eternal mother,—to be found in all classes of life, ever vigilant, suspicious, watchful. Her glance shifted from Fantine and tarried uneasily on the door of the adjoining room.

Unable longer to hide her agitation, she decided to have the matter over with. Hastening into the bedroom, she opened the drawer of an old-fashioned bureau and took out a revolver. With the sudden impulsiveness of her race, she turned and hurried back to where Fantine was now standing.

Fantine saw the revolver in her mother's hand and jumped back.

"Where did you get this revolver, Fantine?" Rosalie spoke sharply in French.

All the girlishness left Fantine's face.

"Mere," she answered, knowing from former experience that the sound of her native language would soothe her mother's temper, and by the use of it she hoped to gain time in which to shape a plausible excuse.

Rosalie Avenel trembled. She knew that Fantine was eluding an answer.

"Does this revolver belong to the pawnbroker?"

Fantine remained silent.

"How did you come by it? Did you go to work for him this morning?"

The girl hesitated a moment, then ran and put her arms around her mother's neck. Not to be cajoled, Rosalie pushed her away.

"Answer me! How did you come by it?"

Suddenly the door opened and the square-shouldered figure of a powerfully built man blocked the entrance. Guerre, the leader of a small band of crooks in New York, an acquaintance of the long-ago days when Rosalie had lived in Flanders and he had worked as a lieutenant under Avenel, entered the room. In a flash his magnetic eyes took in the situation. They seemed to throw a compelling force of light from under their heavy jet black brows. Composedly he walked up to Rosalie. Immediately she felt the fire of his hypnotic glance and her anger seemed to melt. She spoke to him in French:

"Eh bien, Guerre?"

"Good evening, Rosalie." His voice was warm and low.

Unbuttoning his blue coat, he took the revolver from her hand and suavely placed it in an empty holster on his hip. Then affectionately he put his arm around Fantine. Although not freed from the magnetic spell

of his glance, Rosalie deeply resented the intrusion of Guerre in her household. She spoke curtly:

“What brought you back?”

Guerre did not answer immediately. Fantine broke away from him and took her mother's hand lovingly.

“The daughter of my old pal,” he answered, and heaved a sigh.

“It has taken you to fire her imagination with wild tales about her father.”

“Oh, come now, Rosalie, I love the child. She is——”

He did not finish his speech. A long shrill whistle from some one waiting in the hall below rose to his ears. Fantine gave Guerre a furtive look. He centered his brilliant black eyes on Rosalie.

“I am going to take her along with me,” and, assuming a ready politeness, added: “Will you permit, Rosalie?”

Rosalie strove to banish the lassitude that overcame her, but under his overpowering personality she could make no further opposition than to question:

“Where are you taking her?”

"Only for a walk. We won't be late." And placing his arm once more across the slender shoulders of Fantine, he led the girl towards the doorway. With a laugh in her voice, Fantine called lightly:

"Don't worry, mother. I'll be home early."

When they had reached the first landing Guerre spoke to her roughly: "Fantine, you were careless with that revolver! How did you come to keep it?"

"I was so sleepy I forgot all about it."

"The daughter of Leon Avenel should know better." A certain pride and tenderness came into his voice as he spoke the name, Leon Avenel. Memories of Paris and Montmartre came crowding into his mind.

Fantine gripped his arm.

"Tell me about my father. Mother won't mention him."

Guerre closed one hand over hers.

"Too bad. Your mother doesn't understand. He was the greatest—the last reckless son of the old family of Avenel. He could trace a clear lineage back——" A voice interrupted him,

The figure of a small man slipped out of the shadow cast by the stair.

"Took you long enough to come down. Didn't you hear me whistle?" In the sickly gaslight the weirdly white face of Bennie was revealed. His tiny black eyes shifted restlessly and his hands twitched nervously as he continued:

"Got the bug around the corner waitin'."

Guerre looked steadily at Fantine.

"Ready for an adventure?"

The girl did not answer, but slipped her arm confidingly through his.

"Where's Handsome Mike, Bennie?" Guerre questioned.

"In the bug, waitin' at the wheel!"

Bennie opened the door.

The unsteady light from the hallway threw an exaggerated shadow of Guerre's shoulders fantastically against the wall and caught the quiver of Fantine's shoulders as her shadow seemed to nestle confidently against his.

They stepped out into the night.

CHAPTER II.

The little Ford, with its specially built top, from which a large window at the rear looked out like a curiously opened eye, stopped in front of a deserted lodging house in East Thirty-third Street.

Guerre jumped quickly from the front seat and spoke to Handsome Mike, who sat at the wheel:

“Reverse the license!”

Mike got out and obeyed orders. Bennie pushed open the rear door of the cramped car and slid from behind a steamer trunk that stood on end. Fantine jumped to the sidewalk after him and stretched her body like a young animal. Guerre took a key from his vest pocket and Fantine, switching her short skirt, followed him up the front steps. Bennie, behind them, closed the door as they entered the house.

The three hurried up two flights of heavy, creaky stairs that sagged beneath curved

banisters, and past the empty niches in the hall at the top of each flight that sheltered nothing now but the ghosts of decayed splendors. Finally they rushed through the musty odors into the room which Guerre occupied, in the guise of caretaker, at the top of the house.

Fantine crossed in the darkness and threw the window open.

"Oh, light the gas, Papa Guerre; this place is spooky!" she exclaimed. The musical tone of her voice seemed strangely out of place as it broke the pervading silence.

Guerre struck a match and removed the glass chimney from a small oil lamp that stood on a table littered with dusty papers.

The flare lit Fantine's eager face as she said: "Oh, we've got gas at home. When I have a house of my own I'm going to have electricity in it."

Bennie sneaked over noiselessly and opened the door to an adjoining closet-room. He went in and from a large wardrobe removed a small coat and pair of boy's trousers, which he threw to Fantine, saying:

"Hurry up, dearie!"

Fantine caught them and laughed as her nickname fell from Bennie's lips. She flitted past him into the small hall room.

Bennie looked over Guerre's shoulders at the papers freshly spread out on the table. Guerre pondered silently. Finally Bennie questioned:

"What is it?"

"Do you think it's safe to let her take that climb?"

Guerre's voice was curiously anxious as his eyes rested on the drawing before him.

"Why, it's only ten flights. You can't scare that madcap!" Bennie almost sneered.

From the adjoining room Fantine called:

"Who's afraid? Fire escapes don't feaze me! The higher the better!" She ran up to them and pushed Bennie aside contemptuously. Leaning over Guerre's shoulder, she took the marked plan of the apartment in her hand, saying:

"Let me see."

Fantine seemed more diminutive in the black and white checked coat buttoned tightly around her slim body. In boy's attire her

shapely legs emphasized the steady reliance of her supple physique.

"Oh, that's easy," she exclaimed, as she threw the drawing back on the table.

Guerre folded it carefully.

"Easy when you're looking at it on paper!" Bennie twitted Fantine.

"Well, you'll look at me on the fire escape! I'll make you hold your breath!" Fantine retorted, as she pulled a small cap from her pocket and twirled it over her head.

Drawing Fantine aside, Guerre handed her a card on which were figures and directions.

"That's the combination safe in the wall,—front room, behind draperies. When you find it make for the window and flash me the signal. You are not afraid?" he added, throwing the full magnetic power of his glance upon her.

"Afraid?" Fantine laughed. "It's only because of the danger I'm going." Securing her hair in the tightest knot possible, she drew the cap down over her dancing eyes and faced Guerre in an attitude of light challenge.

"Leave it to me, Papa Guerre!"

"Aw, go on, some folks do a lot of talkin'!" Bennie broke in. "Take your time, —take your time,—servants and folks away on a yacht cruise. You can skip in there like h——."

Snapping his small black eyes, twitching his mouth nervously, Bennie turned away suddenly and left the room.

Guerre lifted a masterful hand and placed it gently on Fantine's arm. Looking into her flashing eyes, he said:

"Be careful, Fantine! This isn't all play. You are a new hand at the game. You must learn to live up to the spirit of your father, and I must guide you."

There was genuine emotion in his voice as he admonished her.

Fantine felt a fearlessness within her. Taking Guerre's hand in hers, she pressed it.

"I'm not afraid," she said, "only mother——" her voice lagged.

"You must obey me to the last letter!"

Guerre closed his fingers in hers. She felt a new thrill of admiration.

He dropped her hand, turned down the wick of the lamp and blew out the light.

Fantine ran out in the hall. Guerre followed, closed and locked the door.

Ambition welled within Guerre as he heard Fantine trip lightly from step to step below him in the dark. He knew he would willingly forfeit his life to develop in the daughter of his old pal that reckless love of adventure Leon Avenel had been noted for—Leon, beloved of his followers, in whose companionship he had drunk the deep draughts of danger such as only the gutters of Paris can offer to her outcasts. Pausing at the lower landing in the dark, Guerre felt he could almost see the spirit of Leon,—Leon, the big hearted,—Leon, the tender,—Leon, the scapegrace, with lineage that could be traced back to the old kings of France.

The Ford stood waiting with Handsome Mike and Bennie in the front seat. Fantine bounded into the rear seat and Guerre stepped in after her and slammed the door. They were off at an easy speed, heading for the upper Sixties, near Park Avenue.

The car stopped. Guerre and Fantine hopped out and quickly disappeared down a dark alley. In the shadows against the wall that skirted one of New York's most fashionable apartment residences they crept cautiously, silently.

Suddenly Guerre looked up and paused.

"We're under the fire escape," he whispered.

Fantine nodded in silence.

He stooped and lifted her slight figure to his shoulders. She reached above her with outstretched arms and her hands caught hold of the first bars of the fire escape hanging over her head. She swung her agile body free from the steadfast support of his shoulders in a half circle through the air, hoisting herself to safety.

"Steady, Fantine!" Guerre cautioned, in a low voice. "Have you the flashlight?"

"Yep!" she answered.

"Remember the signal?"

"Yep!" she repeated. Her voice lost itself and her small figure faded into darkness as she climbed steadily upwards.

Guerre concealed himself in the shadow against the wall and waited for a signal. Half a minute passed. It seemed to him an hour.

The unobserved presence of Bennie beside him made him jump.

"Gee!" Bennie trembled as he spoke.

"What is it?" Guerre asked, turning on him sharply.

"Come to think of it, I—I—I marked the wrong flight—made a mistake, see?" and he jerked his head nervously forward. "It's on the ninth floor where the people are away."

His voice died suddenly in the crash of falling mortar.

"What's that?" he exclaimed.

"Keep quiet!" Guerre cautioned, as he crept forward to investigate.

"Nothing but broken flower pots," he continued, as he picked up some pieces of clay.

"Go back!"

"But Dearie——" Bennie's voice broke.

"D——, wait and see!" Guerre looked up again into the blackness that hung over him like a chasm.

By this time Fantine had climbed to the tenth floor. Balancing herself skillfully on the narrow fire escape landing, she took from her pocket a small hunting knife. Prying the lock loose, she cautiously raised the window. Stealthily she slid into the room, standing for a moment in the darkness as she paused for breath.

She listened. All was deadly still. Suddenly in the surrounding silence she heard a whirring note.

Frightened, she jumped back. The note prolonged itself into a golden tone as a clock somewhere in the room struck the hour. When the sound had died away she extended her flashlight and threw a shaft of white across the deep blue rug on the floor.

Shifting the ray along the wall, she caught sight of the electric button. She switched on the current.

Warm amber light, reflecting from high inverted bowls near the ceiling, flooded the room. It flushed an orange glow upon the deep blue damask that covered the walls,—she was reminded of the sunset's glow over the sea that she so loved. She looked around

the room appraisingly. The full magenta curtains that hung before the windows recalled to her mind the ruddy shade of the autumn trees. The room seemed to breathe strangely of the outdoors, and Fantine, uncultured as she was, felt its subtle charm.

Along the walls low teakwood bookcases held rows of richly bound books. A baby-grand piano was half lost in a far corner and a broad divan rose luxuriously in front of a deep fireplace.

The beauty of the surroundings captivated her senses, all thought of Guerre waiting below for a signal escaped her mind.

Confident that no one was in the apartment, she settled herself comfortably in a large upholstered chair. She was glad to find a place to rest, for, although she wouldn't have confessed it to any one, the flower-pots she had knocked over in her climb had given her a scare. Her feet toyed in the deep velvet rug and finally she arose and walked across it.

On a pedestal, partly concealed by the gleaming mahogany piano and rich drapings, stood a white marble statue. Fantine, ap-

proaching, looked at it in wonderment. It was an exquisite reproduction of Rodin's masterpiece, "The Hand of God," and the tiny boy-clad figure of the girl thrilled in sheer enjoyment of its beauty. She felt her blood course warmer through her as she looked at the sculpture. Blossoming from the great marble hand a man and woman clung in close embrace, and, as though it sought to work a miracle, some of the lightning genius of Rodin flashed a message—struck the first chord—and awoke a desire for love, art, beauty, in the revolting soul of this girl familiar only with the dirty, overcrowded sights of New York's lower East Side.

As if she resented the emotion the statue aroused in her, she turned away from it.

She passed under the heavily carved arch of a double doorway that opened into another room. Once more she sought the light and turned it on. Long mirrored doors faced her; she drew back as she caught sight of the reflection of herself in the cap and boy's suit, clutching the flashlight in her hand. From the blue mirrored surface her big eyes

stared back reproachfully and annoyed her.

She dropped the flashlight to the floor. Moving toward one of the mirrored doors, she opened it, revealing a capacious closet. Rows of luxurious garments hung evenly from the hangers before her.

Impulsively she selected a yellow silk robe embroidered in gold. She tossed the cap from her head, unloosened the tight knot of hair, and the heavy, burnished bronze ringlets fell softly about her face and throat. She unbuttoned and threw off her coat and slipped on the sunlight colored garment. Once more she looked in the mirror, and this time she smiled with satisfaction. Childishly assuming the hauteur of a great lady, she paraded back and forth, tossing her head proudly as she noted the shimmering yellow silk trailing behind her.

Returning to the more spacious room, her eager glance was arrested by variously beautifully framed photographs that hung on the blue damask walls. Over one was hung a small silk flag, with blue and white stripes and a red triangle set with a single white star, which attracted her attention.

It was a family group, evidently father, mother and son—a handsome, dark eyed fellow, standing between his parents. She examined the photograph carefully. Below on the cardboard she read the words, Havana, Cuba. Concluding that the flag was Cuban, she lost interest in it.

Crossing to the colorful divan, she sank back into its cushions. Her strong, well shaped hands rested deep in the downy pillows as she caressed their surface. Her fingers traveled over the golden beads of a deep green embroidered cushion which she pulled from among the others and placed behind her head. With lazy ease she nestled her limbs into the soft couch.

Her burnished, soft golden hair spread caressingly over the jet green headrest; the flaming yellow robe kissed each curve of her young, beautiful body and rose and fell softly with her even breathing.

Dreamingly she shut her eyes; the long lashes cast their soft purple shadows; the vivid contour of her face became lost in the intense sea-blue shade of the pillow.

Waiting below in the alley, Guerre's expectancy had changed to impatience; then, anxious and angry, he hurried back to the car, where Handsome Mike sat restlessly at the wheel.

Mike caught sight of Guerre's worried face.

"Where's the kid?" he asked nervously.

Guerre did not answer, but looked up and down the street. His eyes rested for a moment, with a malignant glare, on Bennie, standing watch at the street corner.

"She's been gone almost an hour," Mike continued. "We'd better beat it—move around the block."

From the corner Bennie ran up to them.

"Get in," he gasped, starting to jump into the car.

Grasping him by the arm and pulling him back violently, Guerre hissed:

"Darn you, you little rat. Where did you send that kid?"

Bennie's face withered with fear.

"I — you — there's——" Bennie shook from head to foot as Guerre's hands clenched on his shoulders.

On the opposite side of the street a low racing car stopped silently.

"Cheese it, Guerre!" Mike cautioned, as he caught sight of two men in the racer. "Can't risk being copped for a girl."

An elderly man stepped out of the car which had just come to a halt and proceeded up the front steps of an imposing square white house where slender tracings of iron railings were apparent through the dark.

"Coming, Richard? What are you looking at?" Martin Stanborn asked, as he turned at the top of the steps to see what delayed his son.

"That funny little jitney," Richard answered, as he locked the motor of his car.

"Those men were in a devil of a hurry to get away."

By this time the Ford had disappeared around the corner.

Richard ran up the steps two at a time and joined his father. The heavily wrought iron and glass door swung open before them.

"Mr. Kennedy is waiting in the library," the Japanese butler announced, as he relieved Martin Stanborn of his light topcoat.

"What can he want at this hour? It's past midnight!" Martin asked.

"He did not say, Sir." The little Jap turned his attention to Richard, while Martin went into the walnut finished library.

From one of the brown Spanish leather chairs the wiry form of Dare Kennedy sprang to attention. His shrewd eyes surveyed his "boss" apprehensively.

"Sorry, sir, to be so late, but I wanted to talk a matter over with you. There seems to be no doubt that Jack Benson——" he paused and cleared his throat.

"What about Jack Benson? A good man, slow but accurate—my assistant train dispatcher for over a year. But sit down, Kennedy. I'll listen to what you have to say." The financier spoke kindly, trying to put Kennedy at ease.

The detective coughed.

"There can be no doubt in my mind——" He spoke with the slow precaution of a man not willing to commit himself to a definite decision but forced by circumstances to do so;

"Jack Benson is mixed up with crooks."

Entering the room, Richard overheard the remark. He broke into a boyish laugh that resounded in clear freedom and vitality through the spacious room. With the easy manner of a young college athlete he relaxed his splendid physique and leaned against the heavy oak table.

"Shoot! Tell us about Benson!"

His father turned, inwardly rejoicing at the overwhelming vitality and spirit of fun in the boy, but, addressing him in a severe tone, spoke in reprimand:

"Dick, some day you will be in control of my business and you will have to listen to what a man has to say before you make a joke out of it."

Richard moved to draw up a chair for his father, who sat down facing the detective.

The soft glow from the library lamp cast a kindly light on the firm features of Martin Stanborn, the owner of the great Western Nevada Railroad, whose indefatigable efforts and concentrated ambition had won for him the dominating position which controlled a system of roads that extended across the

deserts and northern wheat fields of the United States.

Slowly Martin Stanborn spoke:

"Kennedy, what evidence have you gathered against Benson?"

"There's a little dope fiend called Bennie, Sir, who belongs to a band of crooks. He and Benson have been much together lately. I believe their leader means trouble for the Company. If you will recall, sir, Benson has been a little short in funds. Twice after a meeting with Benson I have shadowed this fellow to a pawnshop on Third Avenue. A very young girl—a mere child—answered my questions. Why, it's suspicious, the very fact that she should be working there—at her age—no one in the pawnshop but an old Jew called Ikie. I felt it my duty, sir——"

Martin Stanborn interrupted long enough to extend a cigar from a heavy silver humidor.

"Be seated, Kennedy. This is rather a late hour, but I am certain that you would not take up my time unless you deemed it expedient. Though I must confess I hardly see any suspicious connection between a girl

working in a pawnshop and Benson, I am willing to listen.

As the heavy cigar smoke rose and blended with the lighter smoke of Richard's cigarette, Kennedy absorbed the attention of Martin Stanborn, which was centered on his employe, Jack Benson; but he could not hold the interest of Richard, whose thoughts, above the rising rings of gray and blue, brought to his vision once more a little feminine mystery, probably a working girl lost to him in the waves of humanity, but whose eyes, deep seas of courage, seemed to smile at him still through the curling smoke.

CHAPTER III.

Alone with the echo of Fantine's words, "Don't worry, mother, I'll be home early," Rosalie Avenel turned wearily to the table where the supper dishes still lay, her own plate untouched. She sat down and made an attempt to eat, but the food she had so carefully prepared was now cold and she was no longer hungry. The thought of Fantine's departure filled her with apprehension, the atmosphere of her surroundings oppressed her.

Every angry word of a dispute in the adjoining flat clearly resounded in her ears; she was used to it by now, but none the less wearied by it, for the quarrel was a nightly occurrence during the nine years she and Fantine had lived in these quarters on East Third Street.

Bitterly she reproached herself for ill-health, for inability to grasp a knowledge of the language that was misspoken about her,

to keep a position that might sustain them, and to realize the dream that had lured her to a new land where she hoped to better Fantine's chance in the struggle for existence. She recalled her attempt, futile in its effort, during those first few days of stolid determination to accomplish the impossible, when she had sought work in a canning factory with little Fantine concealed under the big cloak she had worn, fearful of leaving her baby alone, uncared for, behind her. She recalled the angry foreman's action when he discovered that she was carrying a crying baby at her breast,—how he had taken her by the arm and led her out through the crowded office and coarsely upbraided her in front of the manager. She had not understood his words then but since had come to realize their meaning:

“Where's your husband? Ain't he working? Two can't receive the pay of one; one can't receive the pay of two; stay home and take care of the kid!”

She had tried again, but her second attempt had also been a failure, for her thoughts constantly reverted to the child she

had left alone in its crib, until her employer had sensed her abstraction from her daily task, advanced her half a week's pay, and dismissed her.

And so it had gone on, one bitter struggle after another, through the first years of Fantine's infancy. Later, becoming better acquainted, she had been able to place the child in a nursery, but the early years of the ordeal had proven too much for her nature, the odds overpowered her and, failing in health, all that was left her was to let Fantine go to work at the age of eleven in an artificial flower factory.

Each night, indulging in her single remaining pleasure, she repeated to the unfolding mind of her daughter the legends of the Gallic Kings of France,—pictured to her the great chateaux and vast, weird forests,—listened to Fantine's voice as it brokenly lisped after her the folklore of the different provinces of her beloved France.

Eventually she had acquiesced to the clinging Americanisms the child brought home, and although Fantine's education had not been absolutely neglected, Rosalie knew more

had been learned from mimicry than study. She bitterly regretted the patterns this giant city spread before the impressionable child, but finally, unable to cope with the condition, had almost ceased trying to curb the impulsiveness of this child of nature whose heart seemed to respond to every suffering creature she came in contact with, and whose arms spread to embrace the world with an overbalancing recklessness that opened channels of impending danger at maturity.

Above the shrill Italian voices, which had risen to the height of dispute in the next flat, she heard a timid knock at the door. She hastened to open it.

Timidly twitching his cap in short, bony fingers, and shifting uneasily from head to foot like a pendulum, "Uncle Ikie," as the children of the neighborhood called him, stood in the doorway.

Rosalie advanced towards him, relieved to have the monotony of weariness interrupted, even by the pawnbroker, who had been Fantine's "boss" for almost three years.

Stealthily, without a jar, he shut the door cautiously after him. A quiver in his thin,

cracked voice revealed the uneasiness he strove to conceal as he spoke:

"Fantine? Ver iss shee?"

His shoulders hunched up to his ears as he continued:

"Iss shee seak? Eh?"

Ikie's ingratiating manner of speech irritated Rosalie.

"I wish she had never quit the flower factory to work for you!" she answered sharply. "It's in your shop Guerre found her."

The pawnbroker smiled blankly.

"Aw—I can't help people comin' in. Naw, naw, don't be angry. Can I seet down?" As he spoke, Ikie helped himself to a chair, and went on:

"Vat's de use ov feelink bat? You haft a clefer girl. See!"

He took out of his wide-flapped pocket a string of pearls. From their opalescent, smooth surface a pale glow gleamed between his dark, bony hands and hairy wrists.

Rosalie's dark eyes opened in wonderment.

The Jew seemed to eye the string of pearls contemptuously.

"Fake!" he went on. "Fantine—she knew! She's one clefer kid."

With disgust he flung them on the floor.

"Fantine told me! 'Uncle Ikie, them's fake; don't you buy them,' shee sed," he continued.

Rosalie stooped, picked up the pearls and returned them to the pawnbroker without a word.

"Vell, shee's von vonder to me, how she knows fake pearls and diamonds from real. You'll tell her ven shee comes in?" Ikie said, making his way back to the door and out as quietly as he had entered.

Rosalie listened to his footsteps passing down the creaking stairs, fainter, fainter, until they ceased. Distressed, she looked around the room, knowing that Fantine had not gone to work that day.

"Leon, Leon!" she cried. "Oh, if Fantine were only a baby once more."

Drying her eyes, she walked over to a chest of drawers and took out a baby's dress, a distinctive, foreign little garment. She pressed it to her heaving bosom, closed her

eyes . . . it was dark around her, so hopelessly black.

She gasped . . . yes . . . suddenly it was as if she smelled the pungent odor of red poppies, felt the soft, salty breeze that had been blown caressingly over the sand dunes from the sea, and was looking up at the blue sky of Flanders.

Yes, . . . there she stood, . . . Rosalie Avenel, . . . young, beautiful . . . her blue peasant dress and white apron catching the breeze, a six months old baby in her arms, its little cheek nestling against the curves of her bosom, the little hands pressed into her white fichu.

In the valley vast fields of emerald green grass waved with the breeze, yellow buttercups made patterns of deep gold, and glowing red poppies were in full bloom, while in the distance the sun rose from the sea, pouring a pale yellow glow upon the landscape of Flanders. The little farm houses, with their orange roofs, cast pale blue shadows on the white walls.

Yet in the midst of this fantastic loveliness how lonely she had felt. Why had the

peasants and their wives never entered her home to welcome or make friends with her? Why was it they had never addressed her in the market place but let her pass by unnoticed?

She had come from the South of France, from Marseilles, where the people were so different, so talkative, always ready to laugh at a joke—a stranger in Flanders following her mate. She had come smiling, willing to follow him over the world, but the welcome she expected had never been extended in her husband's town.

Again she seemed to hear the voices of fishermen approaching, laughing, singing, hurrying towards the festival fete in the town of Femies. She had not been asked to go. Quickly she turned and entered the hut, but not soon enough to miss hearing the sneering remarks of the fishermen as they approached. She put the sleeping baby in its crib. There was a knock at the door. Two sea-tanned fishermen, wearing large silver ear-rings, faced her.

“What do you wish?” she asked.

Without a word they turned, spit over their shoulders, and walked away. Quickly she shut the door. The baby awakened.

Rosalie lifted her tenderly and hummed softly,

“Do do l'enfant, dors

L'enfant dors

Do do l'enfant do me ra beintôt.”

The door had opened. The stalwart physique of her husband, Leon Avenel, six feet tall, stood framed in the opening. Her heart beat wildly. She hurried up to him, he enclosed her in his arms, the babe between them. She thrilled at his deep voice as he called her, “Petite Mere.”

The soul that welled for friendship broke loose and ran riot within her even while in his arms. She put the little Fantine in the crib and ran over to the door. Pointing to the retreating figures, she questioned her husband, “Tell me, Leon, why am I so avoided?”

Leon Avenel had laughed, spread his arms wide and looked at his hands: “*Spurned by fisherfolk when all Paris is controlled by these hands! I am Leon Avenel, the Apache.*”

Fate's icy hand had closed over her heart, seeming to stop the warm flow of her blood, but she mastered enough courage to ask just one more question: "And they—these people—suspect?"

"Bien sur! They know!" he answered. "So does your father by now. I am the big Leon. Even the police of France shield and are afraid of me. It is I—these hands you love have never stopped at anything." A loud laugh filled and re-echoed in the tiny hut.

But she did not heed. She was as one from whom the light had suddenly departed. The big Leon had taken no notice of her mood. Kissing her, he had said: "You will be proud of me yet."

From his blouse he took a bag and poured gold coins on the table.

Then she heard the call, "Te viens (You come), Leon?" and turning her horrified gaze from the gold, she saw Guerre enter. Without further words, Leon linked arms with his young companion and they departed.

Not counting the money, she brushed it into an open drawer. The golden Louis d'or

seemed to burn her fingers. Turning, she took Fantine in her arms and went out into the fields to find solace amid the poppies.

Later she saw the merrymakers lagging down the stone paved road, returning past the sand dunes. They were laughing and exchanging parting greetings with their friends.

The sun was now sinking below the horizon; lingering gold lit the sky; between the narrow embankments the canals sparkled in the glow and the silvery willow trees flushed pink in the sunset.

Twilight, . . . the air was cool and soft. Slowly she wended her way back to the lonely home, murmuring softly to the little one that blinked contentedly in her arms: "Soon you will grow up and talk to me for hours and hours, won't you, Fantine? Ah, but you are now sleepy. I shall put you to bed and you will soon be dreaming."

As she neared the house it seemed to her that there was a bright yellow light showing from her front window. She stood a moment, thinking. She was quite sure she had not left a light burning. It had been daytime

when she and Fantine had left the house, but there it was shining brightly through the window.

Perhaps Leon had returned! She hurried her steps and eagerly opened the door.

In a glance she saw three of her neighbors, all wearing their gala black garments and flaring white headgear, sitting in her house. The large silver crosses resting on their bosoms caught the light and seemed to taunt her and to reproach Leon and the baby. But she dismissed the thought.

Perhaps they had come to offer an apology and to say: "Let's be friends." She smiled invitingly and was about to give them glad welcome when the three black clad figures arose from their seats and broke forth in chorus:

"Leon Avenel is dead—dead!"

Making no further comment, the three black ghouls stalked past her through the open doorway.

As they filed out Guerre rushed into the room, panting breathlessly. He did not pause, but gasped out as one from whom the words are torn by the deepest pitch of grief:

"Leon, . . . my pal, . . . is gone, . . . gone, . . . dead!" He broke down and cried. Between his sobs she gathered from him the few broken links.

Leon and Guerre in a cafe ordering wine; rugged fishermen accompanied by their wives and friends; a stalwart fellow carrying too much wine, spying Leon, slurring beneath his breath; the insult caught; Leon's grey eyes locating the man and becoming sharp steel in their anger; Leon's vibrant laughter . . . a command to be gone; Leon on his feet, arms spread wide, laughing defiance; the infuriated fisherman snarling: "Your brat will grow up . . . a thief like you!" . . . The leap, Leon's huge hands closing on the insulter's throat; the struggle; . . . the trembling fisherfolk circling the fighters.

Leon rising victorious, . . . laughing contemptuously, . . . walking away. A gleam of steel! A shot! The terrified scream of women!

Guerre's leap toward his pal; Leon's fall to the floor; the written message of the dying father . . . the grasp of her icy fingers

tearing the bit of paper from Guerre's hand . . . the last prayer of Leon Avenel: "Take Fantine away. Keep her pure as your sweet self."

Guerre's broken sobs stilled as he took the baby Fantine in his arms, quieted her, then put her back in the crib. Then his hurried departure.

Silence. That night of fearful darkness. Creeping dawn. She moved, she arose from her knees, cramped by the one position. She went to the window and looked out.

The poppies were asleep, folded in the gray mists before dawn, and from beyond the gray sand dunes came the breath of the vast gray sea.

Across that mighty ocean was another land—she heard a call—the wonder call . . . of America.

How vividly it all came back to her, the long journey over the water in stifling emigrant quarters—then finally . . . New York. Its gigantic structures towered to the heavens in the gold of a new day. Then the wharf, the crowding, shoving, pushing; the babble of many languages. The officials

who questioned—searched her few possessions—and her first misgivings of the land she had come to conquer for the sake of Fantine.

The wheezy, old-fashioned clock on a shelf in the corner struck twelve. It startled and awoke Rosalie from her reverie. She struggled to break the spell, tried to remember that she was no longer in Flanders but in the little room on East Third Street.

Something dropped from her hands. She stooped and picked it up. It was Fantine's little dress. The room had grown chilly. Rosalie seemed still to smell the poppies and the brackish air of the sea. She fondled the dress tenderly, listened a moment, then arose and looked at the clock.

It was past midnight.

"Fantine!" she called softly.

There was no answer.

"Fantine!" she called once more as she walked into her daughter's bedroom.

Rosalie lit the gas. The room was unoccupied. Fantine had not yet come home. Where could the girl be? With a sigh, she went to the bed and turned down the spread.

Then she walked back into her own room, opened the front window and leaned out, scanning the deserted street. She heard the intermittent throb of the tireless elevated cars overhead. She saw the ash cans and garbage pails piled against the low stoops unemptied, caught sight of the filthy gutters, drew back with sudden repulsion and shut the window with a resounding bang.

What narrowness, what dirt and what a stifling hopelessness within her heart! She wanted to sit down and cry.

A creaking of the stairs warned her of some one's approach.

"Fantine is coming," she thought.

She hurried to the hall door expectantly, only to shut it again in disappointment as she caught sight of the imbecile face of the man who lived on the floor above.

Trembling, she leaned against the door. A sob broke from her. Tears welled in her large black eyes. Her lips framed the words:

"Leon! I have failed. . . . Where . . . is . . . Fantine . . . to-night?"

CHAPTER IV.

Bennie cursed his luck. He knew it was close to one o'clock in the morning. He was exasperated.

"The devil take Fantine," he muttered, as he sped up the Ford, determined not to waste much time in getting back to the apartment. Guerre had commanded, "Go for Fantine," and there could be no side-stepping. Bennie felt he must do what he could to trace her.

"It's up to me," he thought, "but I won't hang around long waiting for that kid."

His mind reverted to Chinatown. There was a man down there he wanted to see. He would be late now, but then . . . the man might have waited.

"Anyhow, Fantine's a clever kid and able to pick for herself," he assured his conscience.

The eyes of night have a curious way of opening at unexpected times. Unexpectedly the door of Martin Stanborn's house opened.

Richard Stanborn and Dare Kennedy came out. As the detective said, "Good-night," Richard, looking across the street, caught sight once more of that persistent car. What was it doing so late on Park Avenue? He watched the detective disappear briskly around the corner, then ran down the steps and, without his hat, jumped in his racer, determined to follow the car when it made off again.

He did not have long to wait.

The slinking figure of Bennie emerged from the alley, slipped into the Ford and chugged away.

Richard started in pursuit. His racer glided out and around, turned in a flash past the street lamps and noiselessly slid on down Park Avenue, then into Central Park.

Richard was amused at the idea of chasing a Ford through the interwinding roads of the park but it promised an adventure. It seemed to him he was playing a game of hide and seek as the little car in front of him turned now and again through the circling drives.

Late at night when the heart of the city has gone to sleep, Central Park, without its rush, automobiles and excitement, loses its New York aspect of a thoroughfare and gains the grandeur of interwoven country roads and natural beauty of the Empire State.

Richard saw none of this beauty. He looked only at the car ahead and knew he could easily have passed it to take a close look at the driver, but if the fellow's suspicions were aroused the Ford could take a short cut in a near byway.

Lifting his eyes for a moment from the stretch before him, Richard glimpsed the skyline along 59th Street,—dark now at Columbus Circle, devoid at this late hour of its vast electric signs,—slender studio apartments silhouetted against the dull glow of lower Broadway,—the Plaza standing out at Fifth Avenue, a gray square of stone, its few lighted windows shining as jewels through the night.

Coming into the Fifth Avenue entrance of the park, a heavy taxicab closed his view, and the little Ford darted beyond it and shot past

a trolley car crossing 59th Street. Evidently a careless driver, Richard thought, swerving only in time to avoid colliding with the taxi as it swung around the racer.

Richard slowed up.

"Upon my word! Richard Stanborn!" he heard some one exclaim.

Hearing his name so familiarly spoken, Richard stopped his car, turned his head, and recognized his friend, Ward Kingsley, who stepped out of the taxi as it came to a halt.

"Well!" he exclaimed, leaping out of the car and extending his hand: "Ward Kingsley! When did you get in town?"

"Oh, about twenty minutes ago! Just got off at Grand Central," Kingsley answered, gripping the proffered hand firmly.

Richard looked into the distinguished face before him and smiled. "You look well," he said, "a little sea-tanned—wind-tanned—snow-tanned—which is it?"

"A bit of all three," Kingsley answered slowly. "This time I have been close to the inner Arctic Circle—been gone over a year.

But where are you going without your hat at this hour? ”

Richard remembered the game he had been playing. It seemed childish to him to confess that he had been chasing a Ford. He evaded an answer, replying:

“The old crowd will be mighty glad to see you back, Kingsley.”

“Drop in and see some of my new specimens when I get them properly set up. I have some wonderful birds—some particularly pure white love birds with black feet. A rare collection.”

The two men shook hands.

“Pleased to,” Richard replied.

Ward Kingsley looked with amused interest into the intelligent eyes and splendid face of Richard Stanborn.

“What a wonderful fellow,” he thought. “What a careful play some women would make to win this chap—money, health, youth, illustrious family, a perfect product of American manhood.”

“How are the fair ladies? ” he questioned, laughingly. “Any special one chosen yet? ”

Into Richard's mind came racing the well groomed figure of Muriel Mason, riding her horse, her blond hair flying and hazel eyes laughing, beckoning him with her crop to follow at a gallop.

He laughed as he answered, "Still fair,—the ladies are waiting for *you!*"

Ward Kingsley stepped back into the taxicab.

"Joy to the younger generation—I'm not a lady killer. I'm not much for——" and the rest of the words became lost as he was driven away.

Richard jumped back in his racer. Another figure stole into his mind; crept wistfully—the girl who had stepped into his car that afternoon, her sea-green-blue eyes questioning, her lips smiling childishly, her little nose tilted high, nostrils quivering in free independence. He felt a tiny thrill as he recalled the presence of the girl, and smiled.

At 59th Street he looked down Fifth Avenue, and realizing it would be foolish to attempt to trace the Ford now, he swung his car, almost alive beneath his touch, up Fifth Avenue and then towards the garage.

By now Bennie had passed through the Bowery, rattled into the circular alley that constitutes the main street of Chinatown, and arrived at his destination. He left the Ford half a block from Chinese Joe's restaurant.

A man in front of the shabby shop had been watching the car approach, and walked up the street to meet Bennie.

Ignoring any greeting, Bennie looked up into the face high above him and questioned anxiously:

"Got the papers with you?"

The tall man nodded his head stiffly; his eyes shifted around timorously, seeming to say, "Be careful, we may be overheard."

They walked into the restaurant in silence.

Chinamen were eating and smoking together at one large table near the rear of the room, their voices lazily singing at one another as they spoke between mouthfuls of food and smoke. The stout and prosperous proprietor watched each newcomer with curious, scintillant eyes. He noted the two sitting at a table near the alley window and shuffled over to take their orders.

Bennie decided to splurge. He ordered a shrimp omelette.

As the Chinaman waddled away the man finally spoke:

"What made you so late?"

"Had to chase after a skirt," Bennie responded, hoping to seem important and make an impression, but he eyed the man suspiciously. He had no faith in any one who came from Wall Street—distrust of moneyed men moved him to caution.

"Say, let's get down to business, Benson!"

"Be careful!" Benson jumped up as he heard his name spoken.

"If you've got them plans, why don't you show 'em?" Bennie went on doggedly.

Without answer, Jack Benson took from his pocket his wallet and removed a flimsy code message, which he unfolded on the table.

Bennie looked at it carefully, then bristled up.

"It's a code! What good's that to me?"

Jack Benson carefully folded the paper and put it back in his pocket.

"That's where I come in," he answered, as he slowly lit a cigarette. After a deep puff he continued, under his breath:

"Bring the money and that fellow, Guerre, around. I'll transcribe it. I'll give him the number of the train—the place . . ."

Assuming a hurt expression, Bennie interrupted him:

"Can't you trust a pal to tell 'im? I'll bring you the greens to-morrow."

Unconsciously Jack Benson's lips twisted into a metallic, set smile.

The suspicions of his companion increased momentarily.

"If I brought Guerre down here and you didn't show up,—well,—after losing Fantine,—it would be all up with me!"

The metallic smile melted, and the sharp eyes, looking at Bennie, narrowed under lifted brows at the mention of the girl's name. Fantine . . . that must be the "Dearie" he had heard of before. Evidently Bennie couldn't be trusted with names.

Conscious of his slip in mentioning Fantine's name, Bennie decided to cover it with

a suggestion which could be cashed to his credit:

“Better let me have your watch. I’ll give it to Guerre and tell him you—you—well—he’ll give you the watch and the kale when you give him the message.

Jack Benson’s face clouded. He was desperate; he felt he had to have the money, and decided to pledge himself. Reluctantly he took out his watch,—an old gold watch,—a gift he valued, engraved with his monogram. He did not care to relinquish it, but he handed it to Bennie, who pocketed it and spruced at once.

It was early morning when the two parted company, their plans prepared to be carried out at a later hour.

Daylight crept furtively into lower Manhattan.

With the first glow of sunrise reflecting from her neat white curtains, Rosalie Avenel awakened. She threw a shawl around her nightgown and shivered in the cold as she walked barefooted to Fantine’s room.

Dawn and disappointment. The bed had not been disturbed. Fantine had not been

home all night! Rosalie stepped back, horrified. It was too early to find Guerre, she knew that, but where had he taken Fantine?

She dressed, put on her shawl and bonnet, and sat down to wait. The cold of early morning made her shiver. She lit the stove and put on a pot of coffee. As she drank it she murmured to herself repeatedly:

“Oh, Father in Heaven,—Virgin Mary,—guard my little girl.”

Finally the clock struck seven. She could wait no longer. Straightening her bonnet and drawing her shawl more tightly around her, she opened the hall door.

She jumped back with a start.

Guerre was standing on the top stair; had come hoping she was not yet awake, to ascertain for himself if Bennie had carried out his instructions and brought Fantine home. One look at Rosalie's face revealed the truth. He forced a smile.

Full of anxiety and anger, Rosalie flared up:

“Where—where is Fantine?”

Guerre turned away, attempting to conceal his real worry, then decided to pacify Rosalie with a lie:

"I came to reassure you. Fantine has been at my apartment all night."

"And why isn't she here now?" Rosalie snapped. "Get out of my sight! It's your fault Fantine's going astray!" With all her strength she pushed him toward the steps.

"Smouldering fires of French temper!" Guerre answered. "Fantine, the daughter of Leon Avenel, belongs to the night!"

Rosalie retreated from him, wringing her hands. Guerre descended the steps, paused on the floor below.

"Go on!" Rosalie cried after him. "Go on home and send her to work."

The street door banged behind him as Guerre went out.

Rosalie leaned against the wall, reached up and wearily turned out the gas in the hall. Her face was stained with tears, her mouth was drawn with suffering.

She waited until Guerre had time to get out of sight and then, with a determined step, she walked out of the house.

The pawnshop where Fantine worked was only three blocks away. Rosalie was there before she knew it and found herself forced to wait. She looked through the barred windows into the shop. It was deserted. She shuddered as she thought of Guerre and his power over Fantine. She stood at the locked door, anxiously waiting.

Finally Uncle Ikie shuffled down the street. He was not pleased to see Rosalie standing there, but he greeted her with a broad grin as he took out his keys and opened the shop. Turning to Rosalie from the open door, he spoke:

“Vat’s de matter, Rosalie? Ain’t vorried, are you? Comin’ to vork for Fantine, eh?”

Rosalie sighed as she entered and sat down on the rude bench against the wall.

“No,—I—I——” but she could go no further with her speech. It was impossible to tell this little man, who was really kind to her, the cause of her worry over Fantine.

“Vell?” he inquired, eyeing her closely.

“I—I—I’m going to wait for her.”

"Vell, take it eazy—vait!" he answered, and at once turned his attention to the window, starting to display the unredeemed pledges.

Uncle Ikie felt decidedly uneasy. Something was evidently wrong. He figured Rosalie would get tired waiting and finally go home. He left the window and was about to take his place behind the counter when Bennie strolled in.

Rosalie recognized Bennie and jumped up from her seat, crying excitedly:

"Bennie, when did you last see Fantine?"

Bennie was startled to see Rosalie Avenel. He had not expected to be confronted so early with his desertion of Fantine.

"Aw, go on! Leav' me alone, will you?"

Not to be repulsed, Rosalie walked up to Bennie, and, bringing her face close to his, insisted:

"You know where Fantine was last night, and if you won't tell me I'll——"

Uncle Ikie was nervous. Rubbing his hands together, he hastened from behind the counter. He had caught sight of a face looking in through the window. He did not want

any fighting in his shop, and even as he moved he kept his eyes fixed on the face outside.

"Wait, Uncle Ikie," Bennie exclaimed, drawing a watch from his pocket and depositing it on the counter. "How much will you give me for this?"

"How should I know," said Uncle Ikie, "before I look?" and forgetting his worry, with an eye to business, he picked up the watch and examined it carefully.

Dare Kennedy, who had been watching through the window, felt he had been repaid for his trouble in again following this fellow with whom he had seen Jack Benson. He wondered who the gentle faced woman could be who seemed so agitated.

Angrily Rosalie grasped Bennie by the arm and whirled him around.

"Thief!" she screamed.

With a snarl, Bennie struck Rosalie's hand away.

Uncle Ikie tried to part them as Dare Kennedy entered.

Bennie caught sight of the detective and vaulted over the counter, striving to conceal himself.

Assuming a disinterested attitude, Kennedy addressed Rosalie:

"Did that fellow steal your watch?"

"No, no!" she answered, for she was not anxious to saddle Bennie point blank with a theft.

"Fantine, my little girl. I don't know where she is and he won't tell me if he has seen her."

It was not necessary for the detective to feign surprise. He found himself unable to connect Rosalie's frank manner and unconstrained sorrow with the little crook he had been shadowing for days, and his suspicion of the girl he had seen at work in the shop almost vanished as he realized this woman must be her mother. But always a detective, he decided not to abandon too hurriedly any clue that might later be useful.

"I am confident," he spoke, looking at Rosalie, "that she is a good girl and will turn up soon. I would suggest that you go home and wait. If you will give me your ad-

dress I will bring you word when she arrives."

There was something in the tone of his speech that inspired Rosalie with confidence, and she answered his questions trustfully as he escorted her to the door, ignorantly betraying her daughter into the hands that were later to close on Fantine.

But Rosalie Avenel's anxiety could not surpass that of Guerre, who firmly determined to re-enter that apartment building in search of Fantine, no matter what chance he took, depending on the hand of Fate to guide him to success. He left Rosalie's apartment and hurried to his room. There he dressed himself in what he considered to be his most stylish attire, in fact, he felt sure he could play the part of a gentleman. He straightened his tie, and with satisfaction examined his reflection in the spotted mirror.

Then he went into the little adjoining room, where he gathered up the clothes Fantine had discarded the night before, smoothed them carefully and folded them into an expensive appearing handbag.

Again on the street he waited with impatience for Handsome Mike and his Ford, wondering why at this moment every subordinate seemed to have failed him. But an explanation was soon forthcoming from Handsome Mike, who had been delayed at the garage. Bennie couldn't be expected to put a car away in running shape.

It took them longer to reach their destination than Guerre had anticipated. The early morning traffic repeatedly stopped their progress. He was really more worried about the girl than he would confess to Handsome Mike, and he knew he was taking a desperate chance, returning openly to the apartment they had hoped to rob.

What if it were a trap and the girl was held there as a lure?

He strove to convince himself that he could make his way into the apartment and carry the bluff off successfully.

This time the Ford stopped deliberately fronting the main entrance of the building. Suitcase in hand, Guerre got out. Handsome Mike watched him as he engaged the hall boy

in conversation and then deliberately passed by, saying, "Tenth floor."

No one questioned him. Guerre noted that there were two elevators, and as he was noiselessly shot into the air he decided to descend by the other. He stepped out of the elevator on the tenth floor and waited to locate his bearings. It was a close chance. He figured the building, the windows, and tried to recall the location of the fire escape Fantine had climbed.

Finally, bulldoggedly, he made straight for the rear apartment. After pondering a moment he pressed the button and heard the electric bell ring. He rang it again and again.

A curious ringing in her ears, Fantine awoke from her sleep amidst the luxurious surroundings. She looked around the room, trying to recall where she was. Then she remembered, and chuckled to herself, the joy of youth within her fully awake, responding to the sunlight that flushed into the room through the magenta curtains.

As the ringing persisted she rose from the divan, ran across the room and opened the door.

She recognized Guerre and broke into a laugh.

"You little fool," he exclaimed, entering the room and closing the door after him.

Fantine opened her eyes wide and tilted her head high as she took in Guerre's stylish appearance with appreciation.

"We're all dressed up, Papa Guerre!" Unconcernedly she walked back and sat on the divan, a dainty feminine picture in the yellow robe, looking up, childishly pretty, speaking softly:

"This place is much more comfortable than home. Isn't it a beautiful room?"

Guerre looked about anxiously.

"You're in the wrong flat!" he said angrily, grasping her wrist and pulling her to her feet.

"Get out of that rig and into your own duds."

He opened the suitcase, took out her dress and threw it at her.

"Put it on, double quick."

Fantine shed the long, gold embroidered garment with a slight movement from her pretty shoulders.

Guerre made a survey of the room, glanced into the adjoining dressing room where Fantine's checked coat and cap were lying on the floor, went in and gathered them up.

The girl slipped her plain little dress over her knee trousers with a grimace, saying:

"Whew! Pappa Guerre, wouldn't it be wonderful if I lived here and you came to call on me!"

Guerre did not find it necessary to speculate on this possibility. Taking her by the arm, he pushed her hurriedly out into the wide hall.

Down, down, silently they sank, the automatic elevator bringing them once more to the ground floor.

"Back to earth," Fantine laughed, as she followed Guerre out of the apartment house. Guerre motioned Handsome Mike to drive away without them. In the early morning sunlight, Fantine, clad in her little blue skirt and Panama hat, sauntered unconcernedly beside Guerre. At the curb she dodged back.

There on the opposite side of the street was the wonderful racer she had been riding in yesterday and the same young man who

had brought her back from Long Beach. Her first impulse was to break from Guerre and call out "Good morning" to her friend, but Guerre had her by the hand and hurried her on. Over her shoulder she managed to look back. She was disappointed, for she was certain that the young man had not seen her. He had been too absorbed watching the Ford to notice her. How really handsome he was! How strong and fine he looked! She wondered,—should she tell Guerre about him?

"Guerre," she began, "did you see——"

But Guerre was in no mood to listen to her chatter.

"Hurry to the pawnshop! You are late for work! Your mother is worried about you!"

Without further comment he hailed a street car and hoisted Fantine after him. In the crowded car she managed to obtain a strap, on which she swung on tiptoe while peering over the heads of the seated people. Through a bit of the window she saw the moving vehicles outside keeping pace with the car. As they came to a standstill at 59th Street, suddenly she saw Handsome Mike

in his Ford swing around the corner and, yes, right behind him, was the racer, and her friend! Fantine wondered whether it was merely an accident, or could it be possible that he was following Mike? But suddenly, seeing a vacant seat down the aisle, she scrambled into it and dismissed any such improbability from her mind.

While studying the women's clothes as she sat there, it suddenly dawned upon her that she was the only one in the car wearing a straw hat. She decided she must look for a velvet one that very afternoon, and in the immensity of the problem forgot all about Handsome Mike.

Immersed in the dream of a hat that would be both serviceable and becoming, she sat back contentedly and rode on, one of the thousands bound for their day's work.

CHAPTER V.

Martin Stanborn looked up from the first batch of morning mail to the small clock on his desk. Half-past ten, he noted, and Richard not yet in the office. He looked out through the wide window in front of his desk, past the spires of Trinity Church and beyond a narrow stretch of office buildings which were wreathed in smoke and steam from the many ferryboats, steamships and surging waterfront traffic.

It was high time the boy settled to work seriously, he thought. Richard should marry and get down to business. When he was Richard's age his own wife had been . . . here Stanborn paused from his meditation to unlock the top drawer of his desk. He took out an old-fashioned photograph. The face of his wife smiled up from dark eyes, fathomless in their deep trust and confidence. They looked at him steadily and he seemed

to hear her unspoken thought. His ears again caught her last words: "I am not really going,—I will always be near you and Richard."

He loved to picture her after the day's work, alone in his library at night, . . . but seldom did her presence come like this into his office during the busy day. . . . Why had she passed away before sharing with him the pleasure of success? How young she had been when they married,—scarcely eighteen,—what a struggle they had there in the little mining camp back in Nevada where he had first settled.

Eleanor! . . . He had never mentioned his dead wife's name unless almost compelled to do so, for even this was part of the sacred memory he treasured and wove around her.

Eleanor! . . . The girl who had given him her trust, her confidence, her youth, who had followed him through the days of hardship and struggle. Again he pictured her as he had first seen her in New York. It had been her courage which had given him the strength to make good. He recalled her grief when they had lost the first baby,—

and how they had come near losing Richard,—and then how he had lost her. After her death he had tried to be both father and mother to the boy.

Richard! What a sunny little chap he had been! Sunny curls, sunny smile, trudging sturdily beside him as a child, his constant companion in the mining camp, pet of the rugged miners. Then, when he had moved to New York, what a strong stripling of a boy Richard had been, striding by his side! He recalled the early holidays they had been able to take together—the close companionship between them.

Yes, it was time they took another vacation. Here it was September, and the first chance to think of a holiday. Fortune evidently didn't mean leisure.

They would go to their camp in the Adirondacks. There he could take up with Richard a problem that had been evolving in his mind—a wife for Richard. . . . Muriel Mason! There was no doubt Richard had been taking up a great deal of Muriel's time. The girl seemed really fond of him . . . her lineage was truly aristocratic.

He would wire Perry, the guide, to expect Richard the next day, and he himself would follow Saturday. He bent forward and pressed the electric button on his desk.

An efficient and pleasant looking woman entered.

"Miss May, please have a reservation made for the eight o'clock train for Albany tonight," Martin Stanborn said, handing his secretary the stack of signed letters.

"Yes, Mr. Stanborn."

"And another for Thursday night."

"Yes, Mr. Stanborn. Any more dictation this morning?"

"Not just now, thank you."

Miss May, smiling courteously, passed Richard Stanborn, who opened the door with a rush.

"Good morning, Dad," Richard exclaimed, as he bounded in, the embodiment of physical energy and enthusiasm, unable to restrain his excitement. "There's no doubt but Jack Benson——"

His father raised a cautioning hand, and Richard lowered his voice:

"You remember last night," he continued,

"when we got home from Mrs. Mason's, I called your attention to a queer little Ford I noticed across the street, and how three men got into it and away in such a hurry? Well, later, when Kennedy left, I went to the door with him and there it was, back again! I followed it, but lost it in Central Park."

"Evidently that driver was more skillful than you were with your racer."

"Well, not exactly," Richard laughed. "I lost sight of it when Ward Kingsley, who was riding in a taxi, got between that Ford and my car."

"Sit down, Richard. Why should that excite you? What has all this to do with Jack Benson?"

Richard sat on the edge of his father's desk and spoke rapidly:

"Well, Ward Kingsley and I talked for a while, and that's how I lost the Ford. But here's the surprise! This morning when I started down to the office, that darn Ford was standing across the street again—planted right in front of the building where Jose has his studio! This time I was deter-

mined to find who was driving it—and, believe me, I did. It led me straight to Jack Benson. The roughneck at the wheel stopped his car on Third Avenue, and so did I; he walked on and up an alley and I followed. I saw him enter a restaurant, so I slid into an area at the side and concealed myself by an open window. I had a good view of what was going on inside. I sensed a plot, but nothing very exciting happened. The man I was following went in and sat down at a table with two other bums,—one was a burly fellow, common as they make them, the other was a white faced kid,—when who should turn up and join them but your very efficient train dispatcher, J. B.”

At last Richard caught a look of interest on his father’s face, and continued:

“They were too interested to suspect of anyone watching them. Straightaway Benson took out of his pocket a telegram and I heard him say: ‘Train 94 carrying special consignment of gold Crampton, 6 P. m. Then a fourth man joined them—dark, heavy set, well dressed. Those four fellows didn’t say a word; it was so still at that table you could

have heard a pin drop. Then the newcomer handed Benson a big roll of money."

Richard took from his pocket his small Kodak.

"Look—this may prove me something of a detective! If there was enough light I got a snapshot of the bunch through the window! Then I made off!"

Martin Stanborn said nothing. His son watched him closely and shot out the suggestion:

"Wonder if J. B. got in late this morning?"

Calmly the hand of Martin Stanborn pressed the electric button on his desk three times.

Richard went over to the window and stood looking out, his eyes tracing the towers of Trinity Church against the buildings and river beyond, flooded in sunshine.

They waited.

Jack Benson entered and placed a stack of letters and telegrams before his employer. Stanborn signed the letters and handed them back.

"Give these to Miss May," he said.

As the door closed behind Jack Benson, Richard turned from the window. Martin fingered through the telegrams.

"Here," he said, drawing out one of the telegrams from the bunch. "Seems you heard right."

Richard read:

"Train 94 carrying special consignment
O. K. Crampton 6 P. M."

Once more Stanborn pressed the button and the office boy entered.

"See if Dare Kennedy is in the office."

The office boy hurried out, then returned.

"Yes, sir; Mr. Kennedy is in the office."

"Send him in." Martin Stanborn's brow furrowed.

Without delay, Dare Kennedy came. His employer spoke in a low voice as he handed him the Kodak.

"Have the films developed this morning, and shadow Benson."

"Yes, sir!"

Dare Kennedy bowed to Martin Stanborn and brisked out.

The financier turned to his son and spoke thoughtfully:

"This time your boyish prank seems to have gained you something, but let our detective work it out—I have a more important matter to discuss. I want you to go up to the camp—open it up for me."

A flash of surprise, an expression of pleasure, came into Richard's eyes, as his father continued:

"Leave tonight on the eight o'clock train for Albany. Miss May will give you your reservation. I will follow Saturday."

The warm sunshine was flooding the street. Richard looked out of the window down on Broadway, now filled with the noon-time throng. Yes, he had wanted to go and hunt in the deep woods. He welcomed his father's suggestion, but . . . suddenly he recalled there was a photograph of the girl—the girl of yesterday—in that Kodak his father had given Kennedy. Hang it! He didn't want to lose that picture. He must get the print from Kennedy before leaving New York.

"That's all right, father, I'll go," he assented, bringing his thoughts back and casting about for an excuse to delay the trip,

"but I'd rather wait a day or two and see how this——"

"Another time, Richard."

The office boy entered with a card.

"Show him in."

Richard knew his father's mind was now intent on other business.

He followed the office boy into the outer office.

"Tell Kennedy I want to see him," Richard directed.

The office boy glanced up in surprise.

"Mr. Kennedy left the office about five minutes ago," he drawled.

Richard strode into his own office, glanced through the pile of letters on his desk, and spoke quickly to his stenographer, who was waiting, notebook in hand:

"Please take a little note. See that Mr. Kennedy gets it as soon as he comes in."

While searching in his mind for the right phrase that would indicate his desire to regain the photograph without arousing the detective's suspicion, the telephone rang.

Richard took up the receiver impatiently.

Over the wire the lightly laughing voice of Muriel Mason summoned him:

"Come around for a moment, Richard."

Richard frowned. His stenographer withdrew into the adjoining office.

"I can't right now—I'm busy—have just begun my——" he began.

Muriel's voice took on a disappointed tone:

"Have you forgotten our morning ride?"

"Of course not—but I have some important letters to get off this morning."

"Don't forget! You are to take me to Mrs. Ashman's tea this afternoon."

"I'll try to be——"

"Oh you'll try?" Muriel interrupted. What about the opera tonight? Mother expects——"

By this time Richard had become fully impatient.

"Im sorry," he said; "I won't be able to——"

"The very idea! And why not?" The voice at the other end of the wire became imperative.

"I'm leaving for father's camp. He

wants——” Richard had no need to finish the sentence.

“How stupid!” Muriel exclaimed, severing the connection.

He waited a while, then, realizing that Muriel had ended the conversation, angrily pushed the telephone from him and returned to his father’s office:

“Dad,” he spoke, “I’m going around to see Muriel. She just called me up,—she seems——”

“That’s all right, Richard, don’t keep her waiting!” and Martin Stanborn laughed knowingly.

And so the note Richard had been about to write was forgotten, and the picture of the girl whose name he did not know—who was at this moment wending her way to work, completely unaware of the web that was fast weaving its meshes around her—had fallen into the possession of a man whose hands were later to close on her with the full power of the law.

Fantine flitted into the pawnshop and laughingly greeted the scowling Uncle Ikie

- in an endeavor to cover her lack of an excuse for being late:

“Whew, what a wonderful morning! Don’t you love the sunshine?”

Before he could answer she was standing in front of him, straightening his tie.

“Uncle Ikie, you go out and get your lunch.”

The light in her voice and the fresh beauty of her presence as she smiled coyly up at him, wheedled Uncle Ikie into good humor; his annoyance was forgotten, and he tapped Fantine lightly on the shoulder as he put on his cap and went out.

Fantine started to make play of work. She pulled a high stool up to the counter and rested her chin on her hands. The events of the past few months had been like a dream. As she sat there alone she thought of the excitement that had recently broken the monotony of her colorless life—yes, it was just seven months ago that she had met Guerre. He had come into the pawnshop—into her life—and a great flame of adventure had flared up before her.

How exciting each day had become. She

recalled their first meeting. Guerre had entered the pawnshop to find out about some pearls. Evidently Handsome Mike had told him something about her to awaken his interest, for he had spoken to her at once, directly to the point. She recalled the tone of his voice as he said:

“Say, girlie, what did you try to slip over on Mike? Those pearls——”

He never finished that speech, for she had raised her eyes and looked into his face.

“Almost a haul, eh?” she had said. “The best Handsome Mike has made, but they were fake.”

Amazement spread on his face. He looked at her spellbound:

“The eyes—the eyes—you have the wonderful eyes of Leon Avenel.”

“Leon Avenel—my father—you knew him?” How vividly she remembered asking the stranger, more and more amazed. She had been filled with an emotion she could not restrain. His astonishing answer was stamped on her memory:

“In Paris—Leon Avenel—he was my old pal.”

His voice had become infinitely tender as he spoke:

“Yes, we all adored the lion hearted Avenel. I held you in my arms when you were a baby, six months old.”

Fantine thrilled again as she recalled the tale he had then told of her wonderful father and of his death that had proven his marvelous love for her. Oh, they had adored Leon Avenel back there in Paris! Why was it her mother never spoke of that wonderful father?

In the growing girl's mind resentment against this secrecy on her mother's part formed the first poisonous arrow that had wedged the breach between them. She had tried to overcome her mother's prejudice against Guerre but Rosalie did not smile on her old friend. How really powerful and interesting Guerre was! In his presence she felt inspired to carry out his will, to win his praise despite her mother's dislike for him.

Fantine recalled how later Guerre told her of the beautiful Rosalie sheltered in Flanders and of his visits there with Leon. Each night he had added more to the story, his leaving

Paris to exploit New York, of his gang and the difficulty of finding efficient minds. He had said she was capable of becoming a leader! Finally she had accompanied him to his rooms on 33rd Street.

Here she chuckled, recalling her experience of the previous night. It had been her first great exploit, and it was all so beautiful that she had fallen asleep, forgetting Guerre who had waited in the alley below. Well, New York wasn't Paris, where you could expect excitement.

"I'll do better next time," she promised herself. "Guerre will be proud of me yet!"

At this point Uncle Ikie's return aroused her. She jumped down from the high stool and made a bluff at dusting. Then she began to sort a number of old velvet gowns.

The afternoon dragged on without any unusual event while she freshened up the sorted costumes.

Finally she heard the familiar cry of Uncle Ikie:

"Fantine, et's six o'clock! Brink in the diamonds out ov the window."

A gleam of deviltry flashed into Fantine's face as she looked at the old wine-colored dress she had just thrown over the panel of a screen to admire. Quickly she slipped it on and ran to the window, where she proceeded cautiously to array herself. Then, with rings blazing on her fingers, she fastened a pair of bracelets around her wrists, reached for a big black feather fan on a nearby shelf and glided up to Uncle Ikie.

Mimicking the manners of the girls she had seen on Fifth Avenue, she swept around the astonished pawnbroker, who stood by an open safe in the rear of the room, his eyes lighting up with keen appreciation of the picture she made.

"Vy, Fantine, I t'out you vas a great ladie!" he said, smiling in good humor.

Fantine turned, delighted with herself, and smoothed the train of the red velvet gown.

"You like diamonds?" Uncle Ikie narrowed his smile into a keen look.

"V-i-n-e dings?"

Fantine smiled and nodded her head as she caressed her face with the black feather fan.

The pawndealer shrugged his shoulders as he continued:

“ Ah, den you are a goot girl, eh? An’ hev an ’onest mother.”

A sharp flash of comprehension lit Fantine’s great eyes. She looked at the diamonds that sparkled on her fingers and laughed:

“ You mean, don’t those tempt me? ”

“ Vell, den, yess,” he responded, embarrassed to have his mind read so quickly.

Fantine took off the rings and bracelets and handed them to the little pawnbroker.

“ Oh, it would be too easy to take jewelry from you, Uncle Ikie. If I were to—to take anything from any one, I’d want excitement—danger! ”

Uncle Ikie looked at Fantine in astonishment. The eyes became sharp steel—the velvet clad shoulders quivered as she spoke:

“ If I were to steal, I’d want the thrill of facing death.”

Had Guerre been there to see her he would have sworn that the soul of the dead Apache, Leon Avenel, had flashed through her being and revealed itself in his daughter’s eyes.

Fantine removed the velvet grandeur, folded the gown and fan and put them away.

"Don't be late tomorrow morning," she heard Uncle Ikie call after her as she hurried out of the shop.

A scolding awaited her, Fantine knew. Hastening towards East Third Street, she wondered what excuse Guerre had given her mother.

As she approached the house she saw Handsome Mike standing in the doorway. Perhaps he had come with a message from Guerre to tip her off as to how he had explained her absence of the previous night. She smiled, relieved. For once she was glad to see this ugly fellow she so intensely disliked.

"Hello, Mike," she greeted him, intentionally dropping the adjective "handsome."

"Guerre wants you," Mike spoke hurriedly.

"Oh, does he?" Fantine drew herself up with a strut, pleased at her new importance.

"It's going to be a big job this time," Mike continued, lowering his voice.

"We are to meet Guerre and Bennie at the

Grand Central Station. You are to get on a train and——”

While they stood on the sidewalk talking, a window was opened. The voice of Rosalie Avenel called her daughter from above.

“ Fantine! ”

Fantine looked up. Her mother was leaning on the window sill, watching anxiously.

Turning back to Mike, Fantine whispered:

“ If I go in the house she’ll keep me in all evening.”

Mike took her arm.

“ Come on, Guerre’s waiting.”

Rosalie Avenel called once more:

“ Fantine! ”

Fantine stamped her foot.

“ No! ”

Darting away she ran around the corner and waited for Mike, who followed.

“ Oh, Mike! She’ll be awfully angry! I’ll get it, sooner or later! ”

Childishly worried, Fantine looked around.

“ Shucks! ” Mike said. “ You’re not goin’ to be any good to the gang. I’m sick of tellin’ Guerre you’re white livered.”

Together they disappeared.

CHAPTER VI.

Fantine felt the cool glass of the window pane pressing against her nose as she leaned forward to look out, fascinated by the ever changing pictures outside, disappearing behind her as she whirled away in the fast-flying train.

Amber and red trees flashed against the shifting gray clouds in the brilliant blue sky; the unrolling hills enlarged as the train neared them, then sank into insignificance when the panorama unfolded more important details—cows, horses, chickens, farms, reminding her of the pictures she had seen at school.

With a sigh of contentment Fantine leaned back in her comfortable seat. The late afternoon sun flashed into the coach as it turned a curve and a nimbus of gold light rested for a moment in her hair.

A meditative mood swept over her. It was the first time she had been so far from

New York. She looked out again. A little country church and store caught her glance,—they seemed to come up to her from their overhanging red and yellow trees,—the church deserted, the store crowded with men and women dressed in interesting, old-fashioned clothes. So different from New York, she thought.

What a tiny town this was! It faded from sight in whirls of wind-blown leaves that swirled around buggies and other curious vehicles on the unfolding road that followed the railroad track.

A new world opened up around her—a land of trees and mountains. The train began to rumble over a bridge. She looked down at the water below—water leading somewhere, yet how different from the sea.

Her thoughts flew to ocean beaches. When she had gone to work for herself she had visited one after the other as her spending money increased. First she had gone to Coney Island, with its amusements and glimpses of the sea; then to Brighton, where the sea seemed more open, and finally, when she had been able to spend two whole dollars

at a splurge, Long Beach, endlessly stretching along the fringes of Long Island into the vast ocean! Alone she had found joy there on that yellow beach and in those giant waves opening up vistas where she could swim to freedom, thus satisfying that urge which ever seemed to push her on towards danger. At times in silence and solitude she had been conscious of the desire that gripped her and urged her on—oh, the thrill!—to swim out to sea and not know if you were coming back. It was the same thrill she had felt when Guerre had first told his tales of adventure and had tempted her to permit his mind to guide her.

A touch on her shoulder aroused her. Lifting her soulful eyes, she looked at Handsome Mike, leaning over her with one arm stretched along the plush backed seat. She resented the fact that association with Guerre meant contact with Mike, who was so unbearably ugly.

“We get out soon, Fantine,” Mike spoke hurriedly under his breath. “You’d better make for the dressing room and change your clothes.”

Fantine's translucent sea-colored eyes turned from Mike's ugly face as he watched her keenly, while he continued:

"No foolishness this time, Dearie. Guerre won't stand any nonsense."

At the mention of Guerre's name Fantine lifted her eyebrows superciliously, tilted her chin at a charming slant on her slender neck, and remarked saucily:

"You go back and sit down! I know what I am to do. Guerre explained it perfectly."

She pushed back his hand from her shoulder.

Mike left. The conductor came from the car ahead, eyeing each passenger as he passed down the aisle. Fantine observed him and admired the fresh color of his handsome face. "Why wasn't Mike like that?" . . .

In the rear car, Mike passed Bennie and Larry without a word, taking a seat behind them.

Bennie's face twitched nervously as Mike went by. Then, addressing his companion, he said:

"Larry, we're almost there,—hope that kid, Fantine——"

"Aw, let the kid alone," Larry twisted his mouth contemptuously. "Guerre thinks she's all there! It's up to us to do our jobs."

"Is it?" Bennie turned and looked out of the window.

The train slowed up.

Fantine sighed as she rose from her seat in the parlor coach and started for the ladies' dressing room.

A boy about ten years of age, who had been sitting in the seat in front of her, ran out to the platform to watch the passengers alight. Fantine's hand reached for his straw hat, which he had forgotten. Swinging it carelessly in one hand, she made her way into the dressing room.

It was empty. She locked the door behind her, then quickly unfastening and dropping her blue skirt, she stood in brown corduroy trousers and white silk shirtwaist, balancing her lithe body on one foot. Without concern she kicked off her slippers, pulled her stockings from her sun-tanned legs, and, throwing them aside, put on a boy's blouse.

She then tried on the hat. Any sense of guilt she may have felt in appropriating the

boy's property was swallowed up in the huge satisfaction of knowing it accomplished its purpose. It topped off the effect she wanted to create. The large mirror over the wash basin reflected back a convincing impression of a sturdy mountain boy.

"But my hat is too new," she decided, taking it between her hands as she crushed it, then tightened up her hair and settled the broad brim over her head in an effective fashion. She now considered the impression perfect.

The train slowed up once more. This was where her pals were to get off. Anxious to see them, she raised the glazed window just in time. Mike was paying an attendant at the station for an automobile in which Bennie and Larry were already sitting. She breathed deeply of the Autumn scented air and sat down to wait for the next station.

The train began to move steadily, and Fantine thrilled at the thought of the new exploit that awaited her. She appreciated the trust Guerre had put in her wits. She sat still. It would not be long now, only one more station.

Someone tried, and then knocked, on the dressing room door.

Startled, Fantine jumped and looked about her. She heard the person call and ring the bell for the porter. The prospect wasn't pleasant. It hadn't occurred to her that some one might try to enter the dressing room. As the knocking continued she became apprehensive, looked at her skirt on the floor, picked it up and then questioned whether she should put it on. Deciding she wouldn't have time, she threw the skirt over a hook on the mahogany panel.

The person on the other side of the door twisted the knob impatiently. Fantine held her breath and listened. The doorknob ceased turning. Footsteps grew fainter down the aisle.

She breathed with relief, for the train was slowing up. It came to a halt. She unlocked the door and ran out.

In a jiffy she jumped from the train and ran a short distance from the track. She laughed as she watched it pull out, a great moving mass of black and gray engine dragging its shining cars across the crimson and

gold country. Her eyes drank in the refreshing cleanness of the scene as she stood for a while taking in her surroundings.

She walked towards the station.

It would be necessary to think and act quickly. In some way she must get advantage of the station master at the telegraph key. Guerre had taught her the code. This was the first chance she had to prove the keenness of her mind that he counted on. Now that she was approaching the station, she felt the full import of what Guerre expected her to accomplish,—could she send a code message as well as she could decipher one? The thought began to weigh on her mind as she realized the danger of her undertaking. Carelessly she sauntered to the door and looked in.

The station master, a busy little man with bushy gray eyebrows, sat before the key, absorbed in his work. He didn't look like a person ready to make an acquaintance. Suddenly, as if aware of some one watching him, he looked up and squinted over his glasses.

Fantine drew back hurriedly. Before tackling him she would investigate the possibilities of the locality.

Walking down the road at the back of the station, she was attracted by the voices of boys playing ball. One little fellow continually missed catching the flying ball and the older boys laughed and joshed together as they teased him.

Fantine watched them.

The boy ran after the ball and tossed it to his companion, who in turn tossed it back, but high over his head. It rolled to Fantine's feet. She picked it up and tossed it with clean aim. He laughed joyfully as his hands closed over it.

Fantine walked up to him and smilingly asked:

"What's your name?"

The little chap drew himself up proudly and eyed her suspiciously as he evaded her advances.

"You don't belong to the bunch. What do you want to know for?"

Fantine thought quickly, truth would be better in this case:

"No special reason. I just thought I ought to know if I'm going to teach you to play ball."

Then, as a bait to lure him, she departed from the truth to add:

"I have a dog——"

The little fellow immediately changed his mind.

"I'm Willie. My dad is tel-tel-e-graph op-op-e-rator."

"Telegraph operator?" Fantine was suddenly on a scent.

Taking the ball from the boy, she tossed it up.

"Close your hands on the ball. Don't let it slip through your fingers," she admonished.

"Hey, Willie!" one of the older boys called. "Throw the ball over here."

"See straight from your shoulders!" Fantine instructed Willie, swinging her slim shoulders back.

"Like this!"

The ball slipped away from her through the air into the hand of the waiting boy, who caught it with a chuckle.

Fantine did not wait to see the finish of the game, but, following a quick impulse, ran back to the station.

Waving her arms frantically over her head she stood in the doorway, crying:

"Your boy Willie is badly hurt! He's down the road."

The station master jumped up and ran out of the station.

Fantine had the key of the situation in her hands.

There was no time to waste. She vaulted over the desk railing and hurriedly scanned the schedules of trains on the table. Then she looked through the telegraph messages. Her eyes finally found the desired one. She sat down before the instrument and hastily flashed a message to Mike and Bennie:

"Train number ninety-four delayed by washout. Will advise later."

She felt that the message had been caught. Surely they had tapped the wire as agreed, but she had no time to speculate on the probabilities, for she now caught sight of the infuriated station master hauling by the hand the wholesome, healthy and unharmed Willie.

Fantine jumped over the railing and out of the window at the rear of the station, her lithe body darting through the sparkling sunshine of late afternoon. Pausing up the road for breath, she turned and saw the little old white-haired man shaking his fist at her. She laughed, turned her back unconcernedly, then walked on, the wayside flowers growing between the rocks along the road attracting her attention.

Following the beaten road ahead, her sight rested on an alluring path leading away into the woodland. Of the woods and mountains that surrounded her she knew nothing. How wonderful they seemed to her! Listening, she believed she heard the voices hidden in the trees. She felt the inspiration of the hills and of the mountains lost in the horizon. Her hand stretched out to break a spray of glistening goldenrod from a clump at the side of the road. The gleaming clusters brushed her bare legs as she strayed through them.

Her eyes lingered on the purple thistles glowing near the inviting path which she could not resist following.

Oh, the call of Autumn! . . . Oh, how beautiful were the forests decked with gold and purple! . . . Why had she never been permitted to see this world before?

She loitered on the path up the hillside and found delight in the crackling of dead twigs beneath her feet as she stepped into and then out from the undergrowth of small trees and bushes.

In a small open space she began to sing.

Briskly she walked to the top of the hill and then paused to look around. She thrilled to the expanse that greeted her eyes and opened her arms wide to the woods and mountains beyond. Allured by the beauty surrounding her, she walked on and on, lost in a new emotion. Like a creature of the woods she made her way through the white silver birch trees and sturdy pines.

Onward, onward, with no thought of how to return. Guerre and the gang had vanished from her mind as if they had never existed. Mike, Bennie and Larry, who were waiting for her second message, were destined to wait in vain, for with that sudden drop which closes the hills in twilight while the

mountain tops are still gilded with enlivening gold, the sun sank behind the mountains.

A quick realization that it was growing late flashed on Fantine's mind. She lowered her gaze from the sunlit mountain tops and turned around to retrace her steps, but the path she had started to follow had been left behind hours before.

She looked through the thickening twilight in an effort to find a direction that might lead back to the town; then, retracing her few last steps, she turned and started towards the left.

The trees were all alike. She stopped abruptly. There was no landmark to indicate which way she should go. She paced backwards once more and came to a halt.

"I can't tell the trees apart," Fantine murmured. The new experience thrilled her. She laughed bravely.

"This must be fear," she said to herself, as she stumbled on, realizing that she was lost in the forest in the midst of the mountains. The dead leaves beneath her feet felt cold, the broken branches on the ground hurt

them, a briar reached out and scratched her as she moved slowly on in the dusk.

One glow of light loomed ahead—a mountain top still touched in the gold of sunset looked like a point of vantage to be attained,—at least it was a goal to be gained. The first throb of fear left her for, even if she was ignorant of the country, it was all so wonderful, so vast, so majestic!

Determinedly she trudged on toward the mountain that grew dark before her. Bravely she advanced, but the shadow of the approaching night enveloped her; the mysterious silence of the woods weighed on her; the unresponsive stillness engulfed her. If it had been the sea the waves would have helped her towards the shore, but the undulating hills remained so still, so far away!

The smell of the pines closed in on her; they swayed their blue branches while the dying day breathed its last breath.

Her body was tired but bravely she pushed on.

Suddenly the thought of Guerre shot through her weary brain. She crumpled up on the ground, too tired to go further. A

stick struck her; she sat up and leaned back against a tree. The straw hat cut into her neck and bound her forehead with a sharp band of pain,—it annoyed her. She threw the hat angrily upon the ground and pressed her foot on it,—the broken straw scratched her; she slipped her fingers across the scratch and closed her hand on her foot. Her legs were bleeding from the branches she had brushed through unnoticed. She passed her hand over them.

Smears of blood were dark on her fingers when she lifted them closer to view in the dusk. She rubbed her eyes and closed them. A vision of Mike, Bennie and Larry waiting at the telegraph pole came vividly before her. With a shiver she opened her eyes and fingers simultaneously. Holding up one hand she counted on two fingers of the other:

“Once! Twice! I’ve failed on the job. Guerre’ll give it to me if I ever get back.”

Her face rested in her hands as she interlaced her fingers, whispering to herself: “Oh, Mike, I’m sorry! If I’d only gotten off a second dispatch I wouldn’t care!”

She dropped her hands and sank her slim fingers into the cool moss at the roots of the tree, repeating:

“ I’m sorry! I’m sorry! ”

To Mike, Bennie and Larry, who were at that moment waiting on the deserted road near the railroad track, Fantine’s contrition for her failure to send the second message would not have mitigated their anger, which was steadily rising as the sun sank and the night closed around them.

They had received no warning of the approach of the oncoming train, but Larry, sensing the vibration of the track, had stooped with his ear to the rail to judge the distance it had to travel.

He jumped to his feet and excitedly motioned Mike and Bennie to make for their car.

“ Speed up! ” Larry yelled at Mike as they jumped in.

“ Leave the car on the railroad crossing and we’ll all jump! ”

Mike grabbed the wheel and at full speed they tore down the country road.

"In the wreck we can make a clean sweep," Larry blurted out, as the automobile lurched at right angles into the cross-road and on down the grade towards the track.

The on-rushing train shot its angle of light from the distance along the track and outlined the rugged road ahead. The automobile bumped over the mud-boulders beneath, as it rose and fell, headed for the train, which now began to rumble through the night. The searchlight blazed closer and the rumble increased to a roar.

Bennie and Larry jolted up and down, back and forth, as the speed increased.

"Can we make it?" Larry shouted.

"No, we can't!" Mike shrieked.

Bennie wanted to jump, but they were speeding too fast. Nearer came the light of the train; he hid his face as the roar increased, surging on, a raging torrent reverberating through the mountains as it rushed by. A jolt sent him reeling into the tonneau with Larry as Mike pulled and jammed the brakes.

Clack, clack, clackity-clack—the coaches passed, the noise changing with each onward

urge of the giant wheels whirring on through the night, away into the darkness that closed around them.

Bunched in the front seat, Mike jumped up, swung his heavy hand over the back, and yanked the shivering Bennie from the floor of the tonneau, where he was on his knees, his face in his hands.

"Get up, girlie!" Mike spit out, as his hand clenched on Bennie's shoulder.

"You're as bad as Fantine!"

The shivering Bennie looked up at the big man leaning over him.

"The train missed us!" he managed to say.

"Oh, it did?" said Larry, sitting back, relieved that they had not been killed.

"I'm damn——" Mike started. "You and Fantine make me sick."

"It's her fault, she didn't send——" Bennie began, but Larry pulled him back into the seat beside him as he addressed Mike:

"You two are alike—always blaming it on that skirt! How'd you know Jack Benson didn't squeal?"

Mike, who was starting the motor, turned from the wheel:

"We'd better beat it back to New York."

Bennie caught hold of Mike's arm.

"Maybe they copped Fantine before she got that second message off."

As this possibility caught Mike's ear he released the clutch and started the car. Driving steadily on through the night, his mind went back to Fantine and her big, innocent eyes that had looked up at him with aversion that afternoon.

But Mike knew in his own inner being that he loved Fantine, her spirit, her bravery. Sometimes he felt that Guerre was all wrong—Fantine was not meant for the underworld. He was almost sorry that he had awakened Guerre's interest in her. He wondered where Fantine could be now. He hoped she was safe.

Fantine at this moment was again on her feet, stumbling with difficulty over interlaced branches and briars that lurked in the dark to trip her.

Stumbling, exhausted, she leaned against a tree.

Suddenly an echo from the hills, something like the roar of the sea when heard from afar, reached her ears. She held her hands to them and listened intently. It must be water—it seemed to call her, a far, familiar voice. Her lips were dry, her eyes were burning. Steadily she stumbled on in an attempt to locate the sound.

Glittering in the shadows, catching the first rays of moonlight, a mountain stream leaped down, falling from afar into the brook that twisted and rippled on, spilling pools of pale light here and there, gray-green and blue shining under the black-green of the trees.

“It will finally lead me to the sea, and I don’t want to die any place else,” she murmured.

Stars reflected in the brook as she came closer. Over the stones she slid to the bank, and, bending her head to the water, sipped a deep drink, dipped her hands and splashed her forehead. She felt a bit rested as she knelt, a cushion of moss under one knee, the other pressed on a rock.

“ Oh, those vast trees closing in my view of the sky! ” she sighed, looking up. As she arose the leaves overhead seemed to open for a patch of moonlight to fall on the dark velvet moss puffing in the green-black pillows along a high ledge. She stood, supporting herself against a large rock that protruded over the water, then climbed it and stumbled back, reaching the stretch of moss.

How soft it felt to her tired body! Stretching her limbs, she sank back to rest. Her tired eyes caught glimpses of dark blue sky, a few stars, and the moonlight overhead, reflecting in threads of silver on the trees. Marvelous! . . . Marvelous! . . .

A noise! A crackling in the branches!

Fantine sat up expectant. A slender animal with extended neck and slim nose stood silhouetted at the edge of the brook, drinking.

Fantine arose, the deer paused. It turned its head to locate the sound and, catching sight of a human figure, darted off and disappeared through the closing branches.

Once more alone in the shadows, Fantine looked up and out beyond the silver birches,

then closed her sleepy eyes and settled to rest.

Alone in the woods, another human being, a young man, left the veranda of a camp fronting the lake and walked down to the water, which reflected in a vast silver sheet the glory of moonlight hanging over it.

Lifting his gaze from the lake, enthralled by the majesty of the forest beyond, Richard Stanborn retraced his steps through the dark to his father's camp, wondering what marvels, what treasures, were hidden in these woods.

CHAPTER VII.

The glory of the morning sun arose over the Adirondacks, one of the beauty spots of America, and whispered its marvelous song as it bathed in yellow glow the forests, streams and lakes.

Richard Stanborn, newly shaved, wiped his face vigorously and looked at the guide, who still snored comfortably, undisturbed by his brisk movements. He slipped on his hunting coat and cap; walked to the gun-rack and selected a light rifle which suited his fancy for an early morning shot.

In no hurry for breakfast, he passed out of the camp and toward the lake, where he could see the nose of his canoe stretched in expectation of a dart over the water.

The reflection of the sun on the lake turned the water to a golden red and outlined his stalwart figure in light as he stood with his gun in hand, looking up, breathing in the beauty of the sunrise, an athlete whose

physique was in keeping with the rugged surroundings.

Filled with the invigorating breath of the morning, he longed to be free of the shore. Laying his gun in the canoe, he picked up one of the paddles and stepped in. With a push of the paddle against the bank he glided off—on and away, dipping a steady stroke, shooting forward across the smooth mirror without destination. Finally he rested his paddle across his knees and gazed ahead in search of a moving target.

Only a few flashing birds were stirring visibly in the birch trees; his eyes focused on the shore and lingered on the interlaced branches and tall reed grass at the mouth of a small stream losing itself in the lake.

Gliding over the surface, silently, without concern, he eventually pushed his canoe into the channel.

His joy broke into song; the air he sang was tinged with the freshness of youth, finding expression, while he paddled steadily up the stream. Suddenly he checked his song and stopped paddling.

Looking keenly toward the far bank where a brook rippled into the stream, he saw a foreign spot of color lying on a ledge, partly concealed by the branches. The rising sun blurred his vision, but with the instinct of the hunter he lifted his gun and aimed.

"I'll give it a chance to run," he thought, and fired a shot above the mark, hoping to arouse it.

Surprised, he watched the effect of his shot.

A slender, boyish form arose as the sound of the bullet cut through the leaves above.

Startled, Richard realized that he had been fortunate in aiming over, rather than at, the mark. He cupped his hands and called loudly through them, lifting his voice so as to be heard above the ripple of falling water.

"Hey, there, kid! I thought you were a wild thing of the forest."

Across on the ledge, standing straight as a stripling of the forest, Fantine looked down on the canoe and its occupant. A soft laugh floated from her as she leaped agilely from stone to stone and stood poised on the bank.

Richard made an effort to paddle nearer, but his canoe grated against the rocky bottom.

"Wade on out," he called again. "I can't come any closer."

Fantine stepped into the cool stream with a slight shiver and waded to the slender boat, the rippling water gleaming around her ankles.

Richard was too much occupied in his effort to shove off into deeper water to notice her approach; with his back to her he felt the canoe move smoothly beneath him as Fantine gave it a steady push. Free from the rocks, he balanced the canoe while she climbed in skillfully. Finally he turned and faced her.

Bewildered surprise shone in his brown eyes as he recognized the girl, who extended her hand in thanks.

"I thought at first you were a boy!" he exclaimed, clasping her hand. "Do you often sleep in the woods this way?"

Somewhat at a loss for an answer, Fantine fixed her deep gaze on him. She reached for the extra paddle and swung her feet over

the front seat. Facing forward, she dipped the paddle deep, and looked unconcernedly ahead. As they swept towards the mouth of the stream his sight was fixed on the waves of her hair that caught the sunlight rippling over her shoulders.

"I—I lost my way," her voice finally floated to him.

"Lost?" Richard repeated in surprise. "You must be cold."

"I slept too soundly to feel the cold," Fantine replied, as they shot ahead over the ripples.

"Aren't you tired?" He wanted her to confide in him, but she only looked back at him over her shoulder.

Richard was charmed with the glimpse he caught of her face.

"This is the second time I've found you," he threw out, as a bait to catch another flash of her smile.

The sunlight caught her hair again in a halo of gold and framed the picture she made, gleaming like a part of the Autumn foliage.

She attacked the water with a clean stroke.

He wondered at the reliant poise of her body as she swung the paddle. Who could she be, this squirrel of a girl, with a little, boyish figure, yet filled with the soft feminine charm of a woman budding into beauty? A real girl, unafraid, with the call of nature deep in her heart, Richard decided.

He determined to ferret her identity.

"This time I am going to demand some reward before I land you. Tell me your name."

Fantine smiled, about to comply with his request. He was certain there had been a tremor of her lips, a start of her head.

"No," she answered, "I'd rather start at the beginning. Tell me who found me."

Richard was amused by her repartee, but he was not to be denied anything without a struggle. Although the camp was in sight, he did not guide for the shore but pulled his paddle and shot on past the landing.

"Then I shall call you my Whimsical Discovery," he remarked.

"Oh, and I shall call you my Blue Streak of Luck!"

Again Fantine turned her head as they passed the camp, her eyes flashing bright blue as they opened wide to emphasize her quick answer.

Fascinated, Richard leaned forward, forgetful of everything but the attraction this girl possessed for him. As he moved towards her his foot came in contact with the trigger of his gun that lay unheeded in the bottom of his canoe.

A loud report! A violent echo from the hills!

Fantine whirled around, her paddle flashing through the air as the canoe upset; her body, following in a semi-circle, fell clear into the water. Richard, one foot caught in the seat, was dragged under.

Surprised, Fantine came to the surface and looked about for Richard. He had disappeared. She realized he must have been caught unawares. By the disturbance under the canoe she knew he was struggling. She could see his shadow under the water. Diving, she made an effort to free him, but was unable to grasp his body. Far down under the water she had touched his head, but was

forced to rise to the surface for breath. Diving again, she grasped him firmly and strove to release the death grip. Tugging like an undersea animal, she determined not to be mastered in the depths. Her strong young arms were strained with the struggle as she came to the surface, holding the semi-conscious Richard.

She looked toward the shore—they were not more than four hundred yards from the camp. Without hesitation she started to swim, assisting him as they went forward.

Slowly Richard regained his strength. He loosened himself from Fantine's hold, and, lifting one hand from the water, attempted to swim for himself.

"Let me help you! Don't——" Fantine said, as she took a deep breath and swam on.

"Don't strain yourself," Richard gasped.

"You must have hurt yourself! It was so sudden! Be quiet! It's easy to swim to shore with another body. It's a game I've often played in the East River."

Richard was yet too stunned to catch her reference to the East River, but in an effort

to prove he was not hurt he took a steady stroke by her side as they neared the shore.

"I didn't expect to see you flying through the air," he laughed out. "Come on, I'm all right!"

Together, side by side, they cut through the water and climbed the bank.

Standing there, Richard laughed again as he looked at his companion, the water still clinging to her long lashes and hair, dripping down her neck and into the soft curves of her body that hid beneath the boy's blouse and trousers as she stood swinging her arms and shaking her legs, with the drops sparkling off in the sunshine.

"Hurry and get these wet things off," he said.

She ran on ahead of him and leaped on the veranda.

When the girl entered the main room of the camp and saw the burning logs in the fireplace, all weariness, all wetness, was forgotten. As she stood looking into the fire, extending her warm white hands to the blaze, Richard picked up his dressing gown and threw it around her. He then opened a

large cedar chest, lifted out various folded blankets and sweaters, also men's and women's fishing outfits. Finally from the melee he took a girl's khaki costume, which he handed to Fantine. She unfolded the short brown skirt and coat while he searched once more. Extending a pair of the smallest shoes he could find, he asked humorously:

"Will they fit?"

"They'll have to!" Fantine laughed, as she examined them.

"Go into that room and put them on," Richard directed, pointing to the door of Martin Stanborn's room that adjoined his own.

"Perry!" he called to the guide, who was busy outside the camp, "Breakfast for two."

Richard then entered his room to change his clothes. As he stood searching through his suitcase for a comfortable shirt he could hear Fantine's wet garments slush to the floor on the other side of the thin partition. He smiled, thoroughly satisfied with the situation. She began to sing, and he listened attentively. She was trilling the words of a French song in unrestrained joy. He won-

dered a moment. Where had she learned French? She seemed more of a mystery than ever.

Dressed in a comfortable lounging suit, he went out and joined Perry, who was setting the table by the fireplace. Richard placed a plate of sizzling bacon and eggs on the table as Fantine, trimly clad in the khaki dress, her wet hair pulled straight back from her forehead, stepped from his father's room.

Humorously, Richard clicked his heels together and, lifting his right hand, gave her a military salute. She ran lightly across the room and took one of his hands in her own. He smiled his pleasure as she looked up confidently into his face.

Tenderly his other hand touched her forehead.

She raised her sea-eyes to his brown ones.

Richard stepped back and let go of her hand, startled by the magnetic thrill awakened in him by this unknown girl. He turned away, conscious of the emotion, but striving to conceal it.

He pulled back a chair at the table for her and they sat down.

"It's the first time I've been in the woods. I love them."

Richard laughed.

"And you managed to get lost so soon? How did you happen to wander away from your friends?"

Fantine's face clouded. Gone was the sunshine, the fresh morning joy, from her heart, for the thought of Guerre faced her and the man sitting opposite seemed far away as he spoke of her friends. Her mind whirled back to Handsome Mike, Bennie and Larry. Where were they now, she wondered.

Richard saw each change of thought as it molded her expression. While he sipped his hot coffee he watched her and wondered. He was certain she was trying to keep something from him.

Lifting the cloud from her face, suddenly Fantine broke into laughter as she spoke:

"I can get into more trouble the easiest! You see, it was the goldenrod,—it tempted me,—and then the path—it led me on! I couldn't find my way back—it got so dark!"

"Back where?" Richard asked, as his voice broke a trifle, hoping she might betray herself.

Fantine was about to answer, "The station," but caught herself abruptly.

The eyes opposite had not left her face, had not lost one change of expression.

"Come on," Richard said, rising from the table. "We'll go out in the sunshine and you can dry your hair."

Fantine jumped up from her chair and stepped lightly as she followed him to the veranda.

He heard the sound of her little heels as they crossed the bare floor. He turned and looked at her feet. "How lucky that Muriel left those shoes and clothes behind," he thought, but he said:

"Your clothes fit pretty well."

"These look like expensive shoes," Fantine said, as she skipped to the edge of the veranda and looked up at a bird circling in the far blue sky.

"I'll tell you what," Richard continued, "we'll make a day of it! I'll show you how to shoot. We'll take our lunch to the woods

and then Perry can guide you back to your friends."

The light that illuminated Fantine's features vanished as she came back into the shadow.

"What is it?" he asked. "Don't you want to go back to—to——"

"To New York—I'll have to go back."

Fantine sat down, lifting her hair wide in her hands, her back to the sun, a purple and green shadow playing along the edge of glistening gold that waved back and forth as she tossed her head. Almost unconscious of Richard's presence, he thought of Guerre and wondered what excuse she could give when she got back.

"You are keeping something from me!" Richard's tone was almost tender as he asked:

"What worries you?"

Fantine shook her head and sighed:

"Je ne sais quoi."

"Where did you learn French?" He watched her intently, his voice betraying a new interest.

Fantine's heart leaped with pleasure. She was glad that she could answer truthfully:

"My mother taught me. She was born in France."

"Oh!" Richard noted the pleasure in her voice and felt that she would soon be confiding in him.

"But what about those friends?" he asked.

"Never mind my friends!" Fantine answered.

As the thought of Guerre surged through her brain once more she felt the magnetic presence of the dominating Frenchman almost as if she were within his vision. She strove to drive the mental picture from her brain but it would not be dispelled. She felt that his thoughts were at that moment centered on her and, although she stood in the sunlight, a tremor swept through her just as it had when she looked into Guerre's black, hypnotic eyes in his dark room in New York.

She stretched out her hand, about to touch Richard on the arm, striving to forget New York, to see only the beauty of the woods.

"Tell me your plan for today," she ventured. "Do you think I can learn to shoot?"

Twirling around in the sunshine, Fantine forgot the city, but in New York sordid Vice sought its way toward revenge.

Because of their failure to wreck the train in an effort to get a portion of the consignment of gold, Mike and Larry were out of humor. Mike and Bennie nagged back and forth. Larry endured their quarreling until they stepped out of the automobile in front of Guerre's apartment on 33rd Street.

"Aw, shut up, you two!" Larry drawled out, as he followed them up the front steps, irritated and sleepy. He banged on the front door while Mike was searching for his key.

"Shut up yo'rself! Don't you know enough not to make all this racket?" Mike shouted, giving Larry a quick shove.

Bennie, who stood close behind, fell sprawling down the brown stone steps.

From his room Guerre heard the commotion and hurried down to open the door.

"Be still!" he cautioned. The three followed him to the third floor, Bennie limping.

"We flived last night," Bennie whimpered, as he shut the door.

"What 'u mean?" Guerre flashed around angrily, but managed to control his temper.

Silence settled ominously over the four. Bennie looked sheepishly at Mike, who finally answered Guerre's question.

"It's that kid Fantine's fault. She can't make good on a job."

Larry pushed Mike aside.

"Aw, cut it out! You've been wailin' that same song all the way in."

"Well, ain't it true? I'm sick——" But Mike did not finish his complaint, for Larry, seeing the threatening look on Guerre's face, did not try to control his exasperation. He aimed his heavy fist at Mike's jaw.

Guerre grabbed Larry's arm and pushed him away, his own powerful figure confronting Mike.

"Didn't you get any message from the girl?" he demanded.

"Yep,—one," Mike muttered.

Guerre reasoned quickly. He clenched his hands and his face flamed livid red.

"Sit down," he said. "Fantine was on the job. Leave her to me. It's Jack Benson who squealed! One of you get him!"

Guerre turned to the table and gathered some dice together from an open drawer. He handed them in silence to Mike, who took them without a word and leaned over the table to shake. Mike knew what the game meant. The man who lost would be sent after Jack Benson. The three of them would get a square deal.

Mike shook the dice and Guerre leaned over to count them. Bennie gathered them up and then, in a hurry to get the suspense over, threw the dice with a sigh of relief.

It was Larry's turn next. The huge fellow joined the group, winked his one eye at Guerre, gathered the dice together without concern, and shook them.

Mike and Bennie watched each other. Larry grinned at Guerre, who counted. Larry's grin broadened as Guerre looked keenly into his one eye.

"I'm elected," Larry said. "I'm glad of it."

He put his heavy hand to his hip pocket, drew out his revolver, examined it carefully and wiped it on his trousers. Replacing it, he left the room without comment. Guerre followed him to the lower hall. Their muffled voices were indistinguishable to Mike and Bennie, leaning over the rail of the top banister.

The four o'clock tide of humanity poured from the crowded exits of New York's downtown office buildings, rushed on the fastest fleeting feet in the world toward the elevated railroads and subway stations—a flood of office people eager to get home. Their faces were like whitecaps on the waves that follow periodically through the channels of distribution.

By the narrow sidewalk near the corner of Wall Street and Broadway a taxicab was stationed, its heavy door swinging open out over the low curbstone. A one-eyed man in a driver's uniform was examining the double lock to the door. Having ascertained that the lock would hold, Larry leaned into the body of the cab and pushed hard against the opposite door. Once the special lock had been

securely caught, no one could possibly open it.

Unconcernedly, Larry left the door swinging open and took his seat at the wheel to wait. Two men came out of an office building near the corner and partially concealed themselves near the doorway behind wide projecting granite blocks at the entrance, from which they watched the masses of toilers surging out. Larry saw them, his one eye not missing a move on their part. He wondered who they could be and who they were waiting for. Their heads were close together in conversation. He became certain they were watching with a purpose. They suddenly separated. One walked toward Broadway. Larry's attention was again on the doorway.

Just then Jack Benson darted out from the office building.

The man at the corner turned. Benson saw him. He recognized Dare Kennedy, and looked around nervously for a means of avoiding the detective.

"Taxi, sir?" Larry called.

But Benson had already stepped into another taxi which stood empty in front of Larry's cumbersome cab.

Benson spoke hastily to the other driver:
"Grand Central Station. Hurry!"

Hearing the direction, Larry decided to start on the trail, when he heard a voice questioning him from behind:

"Hey there! Are you waiting for any one?"

Larry turned and faced one of the men who had been watching the building. The second man joined him. Before Larry could answer, Dare Kennedy shoved him a five dollar bill, saying:

"Follow that taxi. Don't lose sight of it."

"Well—I was waiting for——" Larry started, but the detective broke into the lie with:

"I'll give you another five if you'll follow it!"

"All right, boss, jump in," Larry said, as he pocketed the unexpected profit. "I can follow if any one can."

Dare Kennedy and his companion, Pat Keenan, jumped into the taxicab, satisfac-

tion expressed on their faces. Larry pulled out and turned the corner into Broadway.

The taxi bearing Jack Benson was closed in by a jam of cars. When the jam moved Larry saw the driver turn off Broadway.

In close pursuit he followed. Remembering the direction, "Grand Central Station," Larry swirled up to the Madison Avenue entrance and came to a halt a space behind Jack Benson's cab as it drew up to the station.

Larry jumped to the curb and opened the door for Dare Kennedy and Pat Keenan, who stepped out. His one eye saw Jack Benson pay the taxi driver. He noted the expression of fear on Benson's face as he turned and again saw Dare Kennedy waiting for him at the entrance.

Benson stood undecidedly on the sidewalk. Larry's gaze did not leave him. As if aware of the hypnotic eye, he turned and looked at Larry. Then a thought flashed through his aching brain. Larry understood. He was certain now that Benson was being followed—and that he was aware of it.

"Quick," he called to Benson, pulling up to meet him.

"Drive me to 138th Street—Mott Haven Station." Benson stepped into the cab and breathed a sigh of relief. As he jolted through the traffic of upper Madison Avenue he realized for certain that Martin Stanborn was having him followed. This time he had escaped and he vowed to himself silently that, if he ever got out of this scrape, he would be through with crooks. He wondered why he had ever let himself be led into the betrayal of his employer's confidence. With a shudder he recalled the white faced Bennie and their first meeting. Suddenly he dropped his cigarette,—tobacco must be twisting his nerves! . . . Hadn't he seen that burly driver before?

He looked through the front glass at Larry's broad shoulders. There was something queer about him—his was a one-eyed face! "I'm unstrung," Benson murmured to himself. "I've got to get out of New York—take a vacation."

Feeling he was about to reach safety, he looked out the window of the taxicab. It was passing the Mott Haven station. Benson knocked on the front glass. Larry looked back and winked his one eye wickedly as he fed the engine more gas.

Benson grew cold with fear as he recalled the fellow—one of Guerre's gang! He knocked on the window again for Larry to stop, but the cab shot on into a deserted road past the blinking lights of flats and factories in the Bronx. Growing hot with anger, he swung his foot up against the glass of the door and shattered it into bits. He shook the door but it was locked.

Larry jumped out. His face appeared at the broken window, breathing his contempt of the kneeling Benson.

"You squealer!" The eye of a revolver riveted Benson's attention and he stiffened in fear. He broke into a violent chill; he couldn't speak.

"Where's that kid Fantine?" Larry demanded.

A shot reverberated through the night. It seemed to quiver and then lose itself in the darkness. Below the ravine the East River ran on unconcernedly through the cesspool of crime that whirls on in the shadows of a New York night.

CHAPTER VIII.

In night's blue shadows of the woods,—by the crackling flames of logs,—a girl and man spoke the first whispers of love.

“What is it?” Richard asked softly.

“Nothing!” Fantine answered.

“But I felt you thinking!” and he leaned forward from his chair, his eyes held by hers, shining up at him almost as if they were two blue sparks of the firelight gleaming in the dusk.

Fantine turned her eyes away from Richard's and looked into the blue blaze deep under the red flaming logs. She had never seen an open fire before. It held her interest. In it she visioned the newly discovered beauties of the woods which she and Richard had passed through. Again she seemed to see the crimson and gold sunset they had stood by the edge of the lake to watch as it faded out behind the mountains.

"It's just like sitting beneath the soft shadows of those blue pine trees we wandered under this afternoon, to be by you!" she said softly, sinking again into reverie.

"Go on—I want to hear more," Richard spoke.

"It's wonderful!"

"What's wonderful?"

"To feel—to feel intensely! Oh—to know that beyond the pine trees breaks the sunlight gleaming in golden pools on the grass,—under those caressing shadows to forget,—to feel safe."

Never before had Richard heard a girl so naturally break into poetic expression of emotion. The way this little creature picked up her thoughts with precision was so charmingly natural!

"It must be your knowledge of French that makes your English so beautiful—your voice so——"

Fantine turned up her eyes to him again, pleased to have her English praised—it inspired her. She continued:

"But it's the lights beyond, that call me. I'd have to leave the protecting shadows——"

"You mean you'd grow tired of the blue shadows and skip away to follow the call of the sun?"

"Well, not tired—but——"

"Aren't you afraid of losing yourself in the giant pools of sunshine?" he asked.

"No."

"Then what is it?"

"Oh, to have felt this great new power—the voice of the forest calling me! But you see—I know the light will flood in and sweep me out of the shadows."

"Of course, but——"

The flames in the fireplace flared. They were both silent.

Perry came in with an armful of logs. He paused at the door, somewhat at a loss to explain the situation to his own satisfaction.

Of one thing he was certain. The girl looked as innocent as the new-born day, and young Richard Stanborn was a man among men. He stepped heavily towards the fireplace, threw the wood down and started to put a fresh log on the fire.

Richard looked up.

"Never mind, Perry. I'll fix the fire."

Perry paused, put his hand in his pocket and took out a letter addressed in a large, flowing script.

"The mail, sir," he said.

Richard recognized the handwriting as he took the letter, and Perry strode out of the room.

Fantine watched Richard intently. He was about to put it in his pocket unread, but catching her gaze, he arose and shut the door after Perry.

Undecided, Richard walked back to the fireplace, then tore open the envelope.

Instinctively Fantine knew it was a message from his world. She sat in interested silence, noting the changes in his expression as he read the contents:

Dear Dick:

I had a wonderful night at the opera,—however I did not miss you,—this does not mean I do not want you! Come back to New York soon.

Lovingly,

Muriel.

While Richard paced back and forth, Fantine's eyes followed him. He seemed strangely thoughtful, turned sharply, walked to the fireplace and threw the piece of paper

into the blaze. She watched the letter burn as he turned away. The blue light ate around the white paper that crumbled into ashes, with the word "*Muriel*" standing out to the last, gleaming acid green as the black ink changed color and vanished in the flame.

When Fantine turned she saw Richard standing by the window looking out into the night, which hung like a thick blue curtain beyond. Silently she crossed over to him.

They stood lost in the primeval silence of the forest.

Richard extended his hands toward her but she drew demurely back and ran her fingers down the folds of the khaki skirt she wore.

"Is this your sister's dress?" she asked, looking up at him.

He noticed how the firelight outlined her figure with warm color and his voice filled with tenderness:

"Tell me your name," he said.

Fantine closed her eyes. She felt the infinite caress of his voice.

Richard looked at her. She seemed so childish, so helpless. An impulse swept over

him, took full control of his senses—a wild desire to gather her into his arms, tenderly to smooth the golden threads of her hair, to look into the depths of her wonderful eyes, but he battled this mad impulse down. Finally, with a break in his voice, he persisted:

“Tell me—tell me your name.”

Fantine’s lips formed into a weary smile that concealed a sob ready to break forth. He was so wonderful, so tender! Why had she not met him before Guerre? At all costs she must not tell him who she was, for if she did so, he might trace Guerre through her.

She forced a laugh and hid the tremor of her lips. Turning, she ran and sank lightly on crossed knees before the sinking embers, saying as she did so:

“I have given you a play-name,—you are my Blue Streak of Luck. I do not want to know . . . your real name, . . . we can never really be friends.”

There was a strange, sophisticated twist to her sentence. Subconsciously she was aware of it, and hurried on:

"Call me—call me 'Whim'! See! That will be the short of the long name you gave me before I tumbled head first into the lake."

Richard caught the spirit of fun she had thrown into her voice. He leaned over and placed a small log into the low, amber glow and pushed a pine stick beneath it.

The room was darker. He knelt on the floor beside her. The dull glow grew gold as the pine licked up a little flame that caught the loose bark and flared into a blaze.

Richard and Fantine were silent. Somewhere, in space, their two souls lost their individual light and melody and blended into one song.

So Fantine felt the first thrill of love. Richard wondered at the mystery that attracted him to her. Manlike, his mind focused on one idea. As he looked into the blue flames under the log he broke the silence.

"You won't tell me who you are——" his voice was deeply thoughtful, "but I am sure there is a streak of blue blood in my Whimsical Discovery."

"I mean blue blood—truly royal blood.
. . . Your feet, your dainty hands! . . .

The way your little head is set on your neck—these signs betray you! Somewhere far back in your family I see a nobleman laughing his contempt at the world—his petty fellowmen——”

“And then and then——” Fantine bit her lips and clenched her little hands tight. She so wanted to confide, to tell this man about her father, Leon—of the ancient blue blood of France—Leon, the scapegrace but still her father, adorable as Guerre had painted him to her in his words, “Loved by all Paris!” But if she told this much, other explanations would have to follow. Guerre, Mike and Bennie would have to be accounted for. She must not betray her pals! No, she must not speak.

Richard had watched her face closely and noted each change that drifted capriciously across her countenance with each shifting thought. He wondered what whim led her in this attempt to elude him.

“My Whimsical Discovery!” he spoke softly.

Fantine trembled.

"I—don't speak like that to me—you make me sorry for what I am," she pleaded.

Richard edged closer. Unconsciously he leaned towards her. Shoulder to shoulder they looked at each other and smiled. He caught her hand impulsively and his closed over it.

"I want to find out all about you," he spoke passionately. "I want to help you."

"You've only met me twice," she whispered.

"Eternity decides," he murmured. "The moment a man looks into the right pair of eyes—he knows—and then——" his voice broke.

"And then?" Her voice filled in the pause, a warmth was in its tone, a shade of rose flushed her cheeks as she gazed into the soft brown eyes that looked into her soul.

"Well, then," Richard continued, "sometimes fate interferes and keeps them apart."

"Separates them, you mean?"

"But——" he went on, holding her hand tighter. "Yes—if a man is a real man he fights the battle until he can make——"

Richard never finished that speech. The door opened behind them.

Martin Stanborn stood on the threshold amazed. He dropped his heavy bag with a thud to the floor.

Richard jumped to his feet and faced his father. Fantine showed no tremor, but remained seated, turned her head and looked over her shoulder. Martin Stanborn walked angrily towards Richard and pointed to Fantine.

"Who is she?" he demanded.

Embarrassed, Richard faced the issue. How could he explain the girl's presence to his father, the probability of whose early arrival he had not speculated upon? Naturally, their day of pleasure would be misunderstood—their companionship in the woods—his lack of forethought for the coming night. Meeting his father's accusing look, he answered:

"I—I don't know."

Martin Stanborn walked angrily to Fantine and pulled her to her feet. She stumbled, but her eyes questioned Richard, seeming to ask, "Your father?"

Richard nodded in the affirmative, and Fantine laughed.

The situation struck her as amusing. Why should the father be so imperious, so dominating? What had she done that he should be so angry?

Fantine darted behind Richard and stood on tiptoe, smiling mischievously over her shoulder at the older man.

Infuriated, Martin Stanborn strode toward her.

Fantine dodged and smiled over Richard's other shoulder.

The father's anger increased momentarily. Pushing his son aside, he grasped the girl by the wrist.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

The daring pride of Leon Avenel rose in Fantine. Who was this man that he might dare to hurt her, to question her? With her free hand she loosened his hold and looked him squarely in the eyes.

"How dare you put your hands on me?" she flared.

Martin Stanborn, however, was not to be intimidated. Going to the door, he opened it, with the command:

“Get out of here!”

Trembling with passion, unable to control his anger, Richard crossed to the girl's side and faced his father.

“Father,” he said, “father, it's night now—you can't turn her out! You won't!”

Stanborn's voice was like ice as he answered:

“I am boss, Richard! I cannot sanction the presence of an unknown girl in our camp!”

Swiftly Leon Avenel's pride died in Fantine and Rosalie's tenderness became dominant in her struggle. Crossing the room, she passed through the open doorway, paused, brushed a tear from her cheek, forced a smile and answered:

“I belong to the night.”

Turning away, she stretched her arms wide to the night, and departed.

The door shut after her, and Martin Stanborn braced his body against it.

"Explain!" he demanded of Richard, who stood enraged, striving to break his father's grip from the door knob.

"There's nothing to explain! Open the door—I'm going—after her—and I'm going to bring her back."

Together they struggled. Richard forced his father away from the door and ran out.

It had not taken Fantine long to find a solution to her problem. Hardly had she gone a hundred yards from the camp when her eyes were attracted by a light.

It was a car, the chauffeur standing by it with his flashlight examining the motor, intent on his job.

Stealthily she crept up behind and, opening the door of the automobile, seated herself silently in the tonneau. Then she sighed.

The startled chauffeur turned and veered his strong work-light on her. Fantine blinked her eyes in the circle of light, and settling herself comfortably in the easy spring seat, smiled up at him.

"Well, where did you come from?" he asked in an amazed voice.

Without answering, Fantine lifted her arm and pointed in the direction of the camp.

The chauffeur puckered his lips, let out a long whistle and nodded his head as he looked at her, fully believing that he understood the situation. Fantine knew she had a point to gain and must gain it quickly. She lowered her hand as she spoke:

“Drive me back to the station.”

The chauffeur laughed. She was so pretty and appealing that he placed his flashlight back in the car, switched on the headlight and jumped in, saying:

“All right, Queen! We’re off!”

Fantine heard a call behind her. She turned. It was Richard, who had followed her. She drew her head high, settled back majestically and, like a great lady, waved him a stately good-bye.

The car disappeared. Richard retraced his steps to the camp, deep in thought, while the winds of the mountain sighed the song of night.

Fantine climbed on the train and handed to a fat black porter a Pullman ticket which the chauffeur had purchased.

She laughed as the porter led her to the berth. She drew her head in under the curtains, undressed as the car bumped back and ahead, tucked the blankets around her chin, and fell asleep to the sound of the wheels whirring away.

The following morning she arrived at the Pennsylvania Station, thoroughly rested. Dressing with a rush, she was first to leave the sleeper. The call of the sun above New York awoke a song in her heart as she skipped up the iron steps and through the inner gates and out of the great stone expanse of the rotunda of the station.

Her fast footsteps echoed through the building and out across the avenue. Hatless, without concern, she made her way along 33rd Street toward Guerre's apartment. More than one person turned to look at the little khaki clad form as it flitted along the sidewalk, pausing at each corner to view the new picture presented at the end of every street.

"It's almost as big and beautiful as the woods," she thought, as she looked up Broadway at 33rd Street, and she burst into

the climax of her song, darting along under the elevated tracks at Herald Square.

When she reached Guerre's place the first misgivings came to her. Standing on the brown stone steps, she hesitated, whistled a few notes and decided to face the music. She tried the front door and was surprised to find it open. Noiselessly she crept through the deserted halls up to the top floor and paused outside Guerre's room.

A heated argument was in progress. Fantine listened; she heard Guerre saying:

"Get out of sight of the police. Put these on and make for the docks."

Then Fantine was certain it was Larry's voice that answered:

"I won't."

"Yes, you will!" Fantine heard Guerre's voice command.

Her hand closed on the door knob. It creaked. As she opened the door and looked into the room she caught sight of Guerre pushing Larry into a closet.

Guerre walked over and brutally pulled Fantine into the room.

"Where the devil have you been? How did you get in?" he spoke abruptly.

"The door—the door—was—open," she stuttered, as she stumbled in.

A fear that they might have been watched possessed Guerre. His hand swung out and struck Fantine a mighty blow across the cheek.

Fantine was too stunned to cry out. She strove to catch her breath and explain:

"I—I was lost——" she began.

Guerre pushed her roughly into a chair and raised his hand once more. Aware of the struggle, Larry stepped out of the closet and hurriedly pushed Guerre aside.

"Leave the kid alone," he said, as he faced Guerre.

"I was——" Fantine tried to explain, with eyes full of tears. "I was——"

Guerre cut her short abruptly.

"Lost? Well, I'll give you time to think your carelessness over."

He turned from her and put his hand on Larry's shoulder.

Fantine looked questioningly at Larry. What was he doing dressed in a pair of long-shoreman's overalls?

Guerre caught the look on her face and wondered if she would ever learn to conceal her thoughts, but he decided to waste no words on her for the present. He pushed Larry out of the door and spoke over his shoulder to Fantine.

"You stay here—be quiet until I let you out!" Locking the door behind him, he followed Larry.

Fantine listened. Their footfalls faded and she heard the street door shut. She almost fancied she could hear the far lock turn.

The slap stung her face. She went to a little wall mirror and looked at herself. There was a deep purple streak forming across her cheek. She put her hand up to it. It pained her, but the slap did not matter. What really hurt her was Guerre's treatment—he had struck her heart! She wondered—oh, what had she done that was so wrong?

She walked around the room. Finally she sank down in the chair by the table and casually cast her eyes on the morning paper.

"MURDERED, JACK BENSON, Assistant Train Dispatcher in Martin Stanborn's Office," stood out in black type, followed by a gruesome account of the murdered man whose body had been found in the roadway.

She read it half through, but it meant nothing to her. Carelessly she dropped the paper on the table and wandered about once more.

She looked out of the window. There was no means of escape. She would have to wait until Guerre returned.

Something seemed to draw her to the closet where Larry had been concealed. She went to it, opened it and rummaged about. Her hand closed over something cold. She started back. Once more she reached for the cold object. It was a revolver. She shuddered, placed it on the floor and felt about again. This time she pulled out a linen duster spattered with heavy red blood. A horrified cry broke from her. She threw it away. It rolled across the floor.

Her eyes remained transfixed by the sight of the blood.

Suddenly the mystery cleared. Now Fantine understood the argument between Guerre and Larry, the reason for Guerre's anger. While she had been away murder had been committed and Guerre was blaming her for her carelessness and was punishing her.

She knew she was a prisoner, a prisoner locked up with the evidence of murder. Her hands clutched at her throat. She was stifling. She wanted air. She ran to the door and tugged at the knob—pulled at it with all her strength. It was useless. It was locked. What if the police should find her?

Her vision became blurred, she felt tired,—the room reeled,—her body swayed.

Fantine dropped to the floor in a little heap, fainting, sobbing:

“Mother! Mother! I want you, Mother!”

CHAPTER IX.

In response to the following telegram, sent by Dare Kennedy, Martin Stanborn and Richard returned from camp:

"If possible return to New York immediately. Benson killed."

The annoyance Martin Stanborn felt in being called back to the city had not faded from his face throughout the silent journey to New York. On the other hand, Richard had been pleased to leave, for he resented his father's treatment of the girl in so heartlessly turning her out in the night alone.

Martin Stanborn believed he had brought up his son with enough leniency to know a lie was unnecessary. All of his boyish scrapes had been gotten out of by telling the truth. A lie was the sign of lack of intelligence and would only tangle him in worse trouble. He believed there could be no truth to this mad denial on Richard's part—in his assertion that he didn't know the girl's name, didn't

know where she had come from nor where she was headed, and it was this revelation of an aptitude for deception, stumbled upon by accident, which angered Martin.

Richard felt this to be the case. He had never tried to protect himself with a lie, and he dwelt bitterly upon the idea of his father's disbelief in him.

So, silently, argued father and son, each determined to be governed by the truth, but splitting over the other's conception of it.

Dare Kennedy had debated with himself before sending that message. When he looked into his employer's face he decided he had done the wrong thing.

"It's too bad, Mr. Stanborn, to call you back from your vacation, but Benson——"

Martin Stanborn eyed Dare Kennedy with severe impatience.

"That's of little importance," he said stiffly.

When Richard saw that Dare Kennedy had absorbed his father's attention, he turned and spoke a few words with Pat Keenan, who stood deferentially in the background. After a moment of hesitation Rich-

ard turned away and entered his own office.

Dare Kennedy and Pat Keenan stepped up to their employer, the latter speaking apologetically:

"We are really sorry to disturb you, Mr. Stanborn, but the obsequies——"

"I dare say his insurance covers the expense of burial," Martin Stanborn replied.

"I am not interested in Jack Benson. If his family needs financial assistance, I will consider that, but as to the murderer, that's up to the police."

The two detectives remained silent. Stanborn opened a desk drawer and lifted out a box of cigars which he extended to them as he said:

"I do not wish to be annoyed at present."

"May I speak with you later on another matter?" Dare Kennedy asked, helping himself to a cigar.

"Certainly," Martin Stanborn answered impatiently, reaching toward a pile of letters that had accumulated and remained unopened during his short absence.

The two men withdrew, but waited in the outer hall.

It was after four o'clock. The office was curiously quiet with no sound of clicking typewriters, nor office boys sing-singing names through the halls. The stillness was suddenly broken by a knock on the glass of the outer hall door.

Dare Kennedy opened it. A girlish laugh reached the ears of Martin Stanborn.

Muriel Mason tripped lightly past the public partitions and into the private office, laughing as she spoke to the surprised Stanborn:

"It was nice of you to telegraph me of your return. I thought I would find you here." She laughed again, uncertain how to proceed to introduce the subject of her visit.

For the first time in twenty-four hours the stern features of the gray haired financier cleared into a smile. The sight of this charming feminine visitor would please the eyes of any man.

Muriel Mason was indeed a picture of culture and beauty as she stood in the rose light streaming in from the sunset through the large glass window the warm color deepening the shadows of her chinchilla trimmed,

olive-green cloth suit, and forming a halo of gold where her hair gleamed through her transparent hat.

Her hazel eyes looked out under the golden-gauze brim with an air of innocence and assumed timidity; her lips were held consciously in a happy smile.

Martin Stanborn arose from his desk and placed his hand gently on the girl's shoulder.

"And to what do I owe the honor of this visit?" he asked, as she raised one of her tightly gray-gloved hands and pressed his hand that rested on her shoulder.

"I wanted to see you," she replied, smiling with effect.

"Are you sure it's not Richard?" he teased.

"Well, maybe!" Muriel hesitated. "I was a little hurt when he rushed away to camp without an explanation. I——"

"Oh, I was to blame for that! Richard is really considerate——" his father began, and the girl decided to change her tactics, for she could see that Martin Stanborn was prepared to protect Richard, so she came straight to the point.

"Mother and I have been talking it over. Don't you think I should announce my engagement to Richard before I leave for Palm Beach?" and Muriel seemed the personification of demureness as she asked the question.

Martin Stanborn threw back his head and laughed heartily.

"My dear child, we have been waiting for your permission."

"I'll tell mother we'll announce it tomorrow," Muriel smiled, and preened in anticipation of the coming pleasure.

"I've prepared a little party for Richard,—we'll make it an announcement party. Perhaps that's why he didn't want to leave the other day! I was so disappointed!"

"Of course; that's natural. Let me see. You have been engaged now for almost a year, haven't you?"

"Yes, almost a year. It was at Palm Beach he proposed—the day before we returned to New York." She drew off her gloves as she spoke.

"It's high time Richard was taken in hand," he began, and as he took one of her hands in his he continued: "I believe these

hands are just the right ones to manage him."

Muriel placed her other hand in his. Martin felt that his dream for Richard, which would forever unite his wealth with that of the Masons, was about to be realized, and that the pinnacle of good fortune had at last been reached.

"You love Richard—as I love him?" All resentment against his son had flown from his voice.

It was not so much the thought of Richard as it was the picture of another man in her heart that had prompted Muriel to start on her quest to Martin Stanborn's office.

Conscience stricken, she tried to dispel the thought of the curiously unresponsive Ward Kingsley, who had never fallen before the assault of her eyes, yet the memory of whom had haunted her since the day Richard had introduced them. She knew that his presence alone filled her dreams with a sense of pleasure, yet she knew that his eyes had always looked beyond her.

Muriel had come upon him that morning, riding in Central Park. She had passed him

at a gallop on the bridle path and had turned and faced him. Her horse slowed down into a walk beside his. Merely the sight of his well-groomed figure on horseback made her heart beat intermittently. Suddenly, as she felt the blood race within her veins, she knew that Ward Kingsley was the man she really wanted, but even as her thoughts raced into this channel, she heard herself telling him:

“I am engaged.”

She had expected this announcement to make an effect, but he betrayed an entire absence of emotion. She realized that his was only a polite interest. Aware of his indifference, she had determined to appear valuable in his eyes as the wife of someone else.

Piqued, she had galloped away from him. Ward Kingsley was not surprised. He had always considered her somewhat erratic.

It had not been difficult to wheedle her mother into compliance with her whim.

“Don’t you see, mother,” she had said, “if Richard values me, maybe Ward Kingsley will.”

Satisfied with her attempt at reasoning, Muriel had hastened to the office of Martin Stanborn.

Now that she stood looking up at the big, successful financier, she realized that she was trying to cheat him in making him believe that she loved his son. But what matter if she did cheat in love? Her mother had always told her that men were made to be managed. If she married Richard she could play the game with a sense of satisfaction in the fact of knowing that he could meet all the financial requirements of a husband, and might, with a little training, even prove to be a satisfactory lover.

She smiled demurely up at the father, but she knew Richard too well to think she could deceive him.

There was a tenderness in Martin Stanborn's voice as he repeated the question: "Do you love Richard as I love him?"

"Richard and I have been friends since childhood—of course I love him. Who wouldn't? He is like his mother!" Muriel drew in a deep breath as she spoke.

"I know, I know." Martin Stanborn spoke in a low voice. He sensed a distance between himself and this girl, with whom he would never be able to talk of the departed Eleanor.

Switching the subject, he turned his thoughts back to Richard and was almost surprised to hear himself saying to Muriel:

"Richard has been talking continually about you."

Muriel fastened the chinchilla collar around her throat with a charming twist of her wrist and hand.

"Has he?" she ventured coyly.

"Just a moment. Richard is in his office," Martin spoke rapidly, for Muriel was fastening one of her gloves. "He will want to see you."

But Muriel had no desire to see Richard in his father's presence.

"If I don't hurry my chauffeur will be leaving me, and it's a difficult thing to find a good one now," she ventured facetiously. "Send Richard up to my house. I'll be there in less than an hour."

She went out, pleased at having gained the object of her visit.

As Muriel left the office it seemed to Martin Stanborn that she was quite the perfect wife for Richard. It was best that he should be made to settle down and this girl was more substantial than she appeared.

Dare Kennedy watched Miss Mason glide into the public hall with a slight nod of appreciation for his having opened the door.

He knew the way was now clear to approach Martin Stanborn.

When the detective entered the financier looked up:

"Well?" he inquired, indicating with one hand that Kennedy be seated.

Without reply, without availing himself of the invitation to be at ease, Kennedy took out of his pocket Richard's kodak, placed it on his desk with studied precision and held up to Martin's view a photographic print. At sight of a poor picture of the dead Jack Benson in a Chinese restaurant, Martin shrugged his shoulders.

"Of what interest is this to me?" he asked icily.

"There is a curious coincidence about these two pictures," and here Dare Kennedy

held up the likeness of Fantine which Richard had taken on the bridge when they parted after their first meeting.

Martin Stanborn looked at it. This time he was interested.

"How did you come by this photograph?" he asked, as he recognized the features of the girl who had been in the camp with Richard.

"It was developed from the same roll of films," Kennedy answered.

Martin thought hurriedly but tried to conceal his agitation.

Noting his employer's sudden interest, Kennedy continued:

"This is what I want to explain. You see this little fellow?"

The detective pointed to Bennie's face that showed distinctly in the photograph:

"Well, as I told you before, sir, I suspected he was leading Jack Benson astray when I first caught sight of them together, and I shadowed him. Through him I traced——" Then, recalling his employer's lack of interest in the murder, the detective

caught himself and did not mention Jack Benson, but took a deep breath.

"Go on," Martin Stanborn said, his eyes fixed on the photograph of the girl, annoyed at the delay.

Kennedy coughed and continued in a confidential tone of voice:

"On the morning previous to the murder I had followed this fellow Bennie to a pawnshop and I was watching him through the shop window. I saw a woman inside squabbling with him. The pawnbroker tried to separate them. I wondered how such a refined looking woman came to be mixed up with that little runt. I saw him take a watch out of his pocket and lay it on the counter. The woman called him a thief, so I went in to find out what the trouble was.

"Well, she told me this fellow wouldn't tell her where her daughter was. I got her to confide in me and she said she had not seen her daughter for two days and was worried about her. I got her name—it's Avenel."

Kennedy paused again and took out of his vest pocket a watch.

"I walked down the street with Mrs. Avenel and then I went back to the pawnshop to examine this watch. I showed the pawnbroker my detective card,—he let me have it,—see!" and the detective extended an old gold watch with the initials "J. B." engraved on the case.

Martin Stanborn was not listening. As he looked at the photograph of Fantine again anger surged to its height in him. He lifted his head proudly. His son had dared to befriend such a girl—had attempted to shield, to protect her, against his advice.

"But the girl?" Stanborn spoke in a staccato voice, pointing to the photograph of Fantine.

"That's just it. This is a picture of the woman's daughter, the girl who works in the pawnshop," Kennedy answered, weighing his words with deliberation.

"I wonder if it would be rude on my part to ask, sir, how Mr. Stanborn happens to have her photograph?"

The detective's words were irritating wasps that stung his employer's pride. Before the financier's mind vividly the girl seemed to

stand, her marvelous eyes looking past and beyond him, smiling at Richard just as they had in the camp when he had turned her out. What a vile game some women were capable of playing to entangle a young man of fortune! He sighed with relief as he thought of Muriel—it was a good thing Muriel had called. He must send for Richard immediately, tell him to hasten to her. He decided not to tell the detective that he was already acquainted with the original of the photograph.

“Here’s a clue,” he heard the detective saying. “If we watch the mother we will get the girl and put those crooks where we want them. After all, Benson was——”

“Drop Benson. I am through with that affair.” Stanborn spoke sternly. “Find this girl. Get her. Trap her. You may go now.”

When Kennedy closed the door behind him, Martin arose and went to Richard’s office.

“Richard!” he called. There was no reply.

He picked up the telephone and called his residence.

Richard answered the call.

"I won't be home for supper," Richard heard his father over the wire.

"Anything new developed, dad?" he questioned.

"No——" Martin hesitated. "See Muriel this evening. Good-bye."

Alone, Martin held in his hands the photograph of Fantine.

He switched on the desk light and the rays cast down from the overhanging green shade caught the picture with a full glow. It seemed strangely alive—it held him. There was something vital, undaunted, in the attitude of this girl, straight of body, direct of gaze. Yes, . . . she was a dangerous influence in Richard's life and must be crushed immediately.

His mouth set tight; his eyes grew hard; he dropped the photograph in a drawer of his desk. As if guided by hidden magic it fell, covering that of his wife. He snapped the lock with a click.

Switching off the light, he walked to the window.

How calmly cold the business world hastened on below in the streets—on into the night. Many evenings he had sat alone in his office directing his energy to accumulating a fortune, assuring what he believed to be Richard's future happiness. He had felt and known the real thrill of success, but tonight his heart was heavy. All these years he had built with the hope of seeing Richard marry the right girl. He must conquer this dangerous situation forcefully, without his son suspecting. The boy had been in earnest in trying to protect the girl, her smile was the foreboding of impending danger.

Martin Stanborn's silver gray head bent over his folded arms as he relaxed on his desk.

Richard did not understand his father's command over the telephone, but a sting in his conscience urged him to speed towards Muriel.

Leaping out of his racer he ran up the front steps of the Mason's splendid residence and was let in without ceremony by the butler.

Coming to a precipitant halt in the library doorway, his eyes caught a scene he was not likely to forget. Muriel, gowned in a soft French creation of pink, was seated beside her mother who wore a gown of green net, their heads close together, bent over the elaborate library table, intent on scanning a list of eligible guests. Mrs. Mason's secretary, a stout young woman in gray, was sitting opposite them taking notes of the persons to be excluded, and addressing envelopes between times.

Richard coughed and Muriel turned around. She arose and glided to greet him, trailing a slim train of rose velvet that hung from her shoulders over a flaring skirt of pink gauze.

"I'm glad you're here. We've waited for you," Muriel murmured, leaning on Richard's arm affectionately, speaking swiftly, yet with poise:

"Your father has asked me to set the time for our engagement. I am going to announce it and give a large party. We are only going to ask the people we cannot af-

ford to slight. There is bound to be a number that will be slighted."

"When did all this happen, Muriel?" he interrupted, truly angered at his father for having so domineeringly settled this matter for him. His engagement to Muriel had been merely a half pledge of laughingly spoken words, and now his father and Mrs. Mason—Muriel herself—had taken it upon themselves to decide for him this whole matter, as if he were an infant. He was indignant, but was too well bred to show it. Later he would speak to his father.

"This afternoon I saw your father and, Richard, he seemed most anxious."

"I see," he reflected. "Dad phoned me. That's why I'm here."

A sense of relief came over him when the butler announced:

"Mr. Ward Kingsley."

Excitement shone in Muriel's hazel eyes as she turned to the butler, saying:

"Don't delay him. Show him in."

Richard watched Muriel as she spoke.

"It's Ward Kingsley, mother," Muriel called lightly as she swept back to the library door.

Mrs. Mason joined her, and while Richard watched them he noted an exchange of looks between mother and daughter.

"Hello, Kingsley," Richard spoke with warm politeness.

"Congratulations. Muriel told me this morning," his friend said, turning away to greet Mrs. Mason and Muriel.

Richard glanced at his fiancée. Had his father telephoned her to announce the engagement ?

"I think Richard considers you his best friend," Mrs. Mason said to Ward Kingsley as they shook hands.

"I am, indeed," Kingsley replied, smiling keenly as he turned and caught sight of Richard's serious face.

"I expect to be his best man at the wedding."

"Thank you, Kingsley," and Richard grasped his friend's hand as if seeking a moral support. "A friend in need is a friend indeed."

Kingsley and Mrs. Mason laughed, but Muriel showed annoyance.

"Come into the library, Richard," the mother spoke, "I want you to go over the list and see if anyone you really want has been left out."

Richard lifted his eyebrows as he followed into the library. "Why all this fuss and preparation?"

Mrs. Mason took from her secretary's desk a well marked list.

"Are these the men you want?" she asked, extending it to him.

"Indeed!" he exclaimed, surprised at her leniency in selection. "The more you ask the better I will be pleased."

Seated beside his expectant mother-in-law, Richard recalled how he happened to propose to Muriel. He studied Mrs. Mason's austere profile and knew she was a type of the matron into which Muriel would develop, always scheming, planning. It seemed to him that in some way she was responsible for his proposal to Muriel. Together they had forced the issue and he had felt so helpless in their hands. Well, of course, a fel-

low must get married sooner or later, and Muriel would, as his father had said, make a capable wife.

He felt himself suddenly aged, a man who had been a boy, a boy dragged around to teas and dances by a society butterfly. What would she do if she were ever lost in the woods? Powder her nose, I suppose! He smiled as he drew with a dash of his fountain pen a line of ink across Mrs. Mason's list, simply to show an independent attitude.

Mrs. Mason looked at the name he had crossed out and exclaimed with surprise:

"I can't cut Jose Vanendez!"

Richard was not surprised.

"Richard!" from the adjoining room Muriel called impetuously: "Come in. Ward is telling me about his new specimens of birds. I want you to listen."

He arose and Mrs. Mason turned to watch him as he entered the main parlor. She admired Richard Stanborn and was really anxious to secure him as a son-in-law. But she knew her daughter! Muriel was not to be opposed. Money . . . Muriel must be contented. She turned her attention to the

invitations and carefully perused the list again.

In the distance of the adjoining room the three could be heard chatting and laughing together. She lifted her voice and called to attract their attention:

"There really are a lot of desirables left out !"

The three heard her and remained silent while she continued :

"Muriel, you have so many friends you'll have to have a larger house to entertain in after you are married."

Muriel's laughter floated back to her mother.

Richard felt weary. He could no longer endure Muriel's chatter.

"I'll have to get some rest after my long vacation," he smiled as he arose, extending his hand to Kingsley.

"I was gone for two whole days, and on the train most of the time."

"What's troubling you ? Aren't you happy ?" Muriel asked as she accompanied him towards the door.

"Why, yes. I am—delighted." Richard lied.

"But you want to go, and you've just come."

"You'll excuse me?"

"I'm not sure that I will." Muriel pouted, pausing at the door.

Ward Kingsley was studying them intently. Somehow he felt that matters were not going to the satisfaction of this young American who had always seemed so filled with the joy of living. "I wonder if Richard really loves her," he reflected. "It looks as if he has given his word and is determined to play the game like a man."

Richard thought of an important excuse, saying:

"I really have to be going, father'll wait supper, I don't like to leave him alone."

"Oh!" Muriel flared, "Don't let me delay you."

She was peeved at Richard's lack of emotion before Ward Kingsley. A lucky stroke of Fate had played this King into her hands, but here at the first turn of the cards Richard was upsetting the game.

Night was descending again on New York, and the Autumn air was growing cold.

Slowly Richard turned his car off from Madison Avenue. A sense of loneliness permeated his thoughts. It was only three days and "WHIM" had turned his outlook towards life completely around.

What a delightful mystery, that girl from the sea! He tried to fit her with a name. Was it Marguerite? Jeanne? he thought of several names but dismissed them, one after the other, from his mind.

How she filled his imagination ! Where was she now ?

If Richard could have looked into Guerre's room he would have decided that something serious had happened to Fantine, who at this moment was struggling to make an escape.

Guerre had not returned. The day had gone by. Fantine was hungry and tired. The seclusion was unendurable.

"Guerre has no right to make me a prisoner," she determined. "I will not stay locked up like a bad child !"

She walked around the room impatiently and looked out of the windows. She felt this

to be a waste of time, but what could she do ? There were no fire-escapes and no ropes, nor anything with which to attempt a descent of three flights. She puzzled over some way of escape. She might get on the roof.

Suddenly Fantine remembered.

There was a glass skylight in the little room she had used for dressing. She skipped in.

Yes, here was the means of escape ! Her eyes could make out the square of glass high above her showing dimly through the dusk of the room.

But the next question was, " How to reach it ? "

" One thing at a time," she decided. With impatience she threw off the khaki skirt and coat, fumbled around in the dark closet and found one of her discarded street suits. While she dressed herself in the dark her eyes measured the distance to the skylight.

She climbed on a chair and stood irresolutely looking up.

" I can't leap it."

Suddenly she noticed that her eyes were on a level with the top ledge of the closet.

If she could climb up on the ledge she could reach the skylight. She dragged up two chairs and placed one on top of the other against the closet.

Then she moved around in the dark, her eyes sparkling like the sea at sunset. She picked up a large leather coat from the floor. She was going to show Guerre what she could do !

She threw the coat up on top of the closet, climbed the scaffold she had made, clung with her hands and drew her body up on the high ledge. Then lying flat on her stomach she leaned over and drew the chair up after her. Steadying the chair on its legs in front of her, she stood upright on the ledge, covered her head with the leather coat and balanced her body.

With all her strength she swung the chair up against the skylight and dodged back from the shattered glass.

She laughed gleefully as she balanced the chair back on the ledge, swiftly slipped the leather coat over herself, climbed the chair, reached for the opening it had made, and

wedged her slender body through the hole above.

Standing on the roof with the dark blue sky over her, she breathed contentedly in freedom. It was air. That was what she wanted. The leather coat was cumbersome. It had served its purpose, it had protected her from the edges of broken glass. She ripped it off and threw it on the tin roof.

She stood looking down at the roof of the adjoining house. It was a drop of about five feet.

"That is easy enough," she reasoned, and started to jump, but caught herself as she thought:

"I might sprain my ankle, and stay on this roof forever, and die !"

She shivered. Better be cautious. Carefully she lowered her body by her hands and found herself on the adjoining roof.

How was she going to get down to the street ? She looked about and discovered a heavy trap door. It seemed to be locked on the inside, for she could not budge it.

She ran to the edge of the roof and looked over. She could see the street below and the

waterfront of East River beyond, in the distance, Manhattan Bridge and farther away the lights of Brooklyn Bridge swung against the sky. The vastness of lower Manhattan under the moonlight filled her imagination with fresh vigor.

Fantine turned away with strengthened determination and looked up at the roof of Guerre's place. It had been easy enough to climb down but she knew it would be impossible to climb up.

"Well," she decided, and, with all the pluck in her nature, assured herself:

"I'm not going to be left on this roof all night. That's worse than being locked up in Guerre's room. I'll find a way."

She looked about once more. The trap door. That would be the only means. Perhaps it was not hooked on the inside, only stiff with rust. Determined she attacked it, tugged and pulled with all her strength until her cheeks were glowing and her body grew warm in the effort.

Evidently it was fastened.

Taking a deep breath, she tugged again.

Suddenly with a bang the door flew up, its hook pulled out.

Fantine fell back, stretched on the tin roof. As she sat down with a bump she looked up at the sky and sighed out loud:

“Whew ! I didn’t expect that ! I’ll wait a while and then make my way down. I won’t have any trouble now.”

So she thought.

CHAPTER X.

Night was coming. Fantine stood on the street corner irresolutely looking about, undecided which way to go. She hesitated to turn her steps homeward for the thought of her mother brought no hope of leniency. Her mother was sure to be provoked, to question and scold her. Immediately she decided to take a walk and give herself time to shape some sort of an excuse to explain her absence.

Her slight graceful body swung lightly down the street. If her step was light, her heart was heavy for the moment.

"Mother does not understand," she thought, "but my father, ah, father ! He would understand."

The father, Leon Avenel, whose romantic character Guerre had so vividly painted in the child's imagination, would have laughed if he had seen her tugging at the trap door on the roof; cautiously stepping down the

stairs to the lower hall, only to find the front door barred and immovable beyond her strength, quietly waiting for the night to come before sneaking to the first floor window through which she had finally dropped to the street. There had been a thrill at the mere thought that she might be seen. Carefully she had lowered her body without looking down into the space through which she must fall before reaching freedom, had shut her eyes and had taken the drop fully six feet without a quaver. Recovering herself agilely on stinging feet she scurried around the corner, as if attracted by a magnet, in the direction away from home. Little did she realize that Fate spends her spare moments playing tricks on us. The half hours we spend most happily and without forethought are the ones which later cause unexpected developments in our lives.

The sudden whirr of an automobile caused her to look up. She recognized the racer which had brought her back from Long Beach. The same young man was at the wheel, her friend of the woods. Impulsively

she cupped her hands and hoo-hooed, her childish voice piercing the night.

Richard Stanborn looked up from the wheel, caught sight of the girl and swerved the car in her direction. Fantine waved happily. "This time I found you," she laughed. He smiled joyfully as his car stopped.

"And I—strange ! I—I was thinking about you and still wondering what your name is. Climb in."

Fantine needed no second invitation, but settled herself comfortably beside him in the racer. As they whirled smoothly up the Avenue the annoyance of the past afternoon fell from Richard's mind. Muriel, the engagement party, both were forgotten. He felt that Fate had guided him to this girl who had so captivated his fancy. With one hand he lit a cigarette, looking at her attentively while the car sped along. She was rather disheveled. Her soft hair tumbled in disorder about her face which was streaked with some of the dust of her escapade. He looked at her hands and noticed they were gray with dirt. He wanted to laugh, but

even as he looked he perceived a smear of blood and refrained. His hand went out to close on her's, but she gave him one of her quick looks and hurriedly put her hands behind her back.

"How did you hurt your hand?" Richard was anxious.

"O, I cut it on the roof."

"How on the roof? What roof?"

Fantine could not conceal her embarrassment. Richard watched her intently.

"You're a strange little being. I must say your departure from the camp was rather majestic! If the Governor had seen how well you fitted into the tonneau of his car and had heard Joseph's enthusiastic remarks about you, he too, might be anxious to know how you happened to cut your hand on the roof."

The mention of Martin Stanborn was not pleasant to Fantine. Abruptly she spoke:

"I got the best of him."

"Of whom?" Richard inquired.

"Your father. It was silly of him to be angry, and it was mean of him, just because

the camp was his, to order me out. Well, if he didn't like me, I don't like him."

"Don't let us fuss over father ! Suppose I take you somewhere and we have supper, some place where there is music !"

Fantine remembered that she had had nothing to eat and suddenly relished the prospect of food.

"Do you mean some place where there is dancing while you eat, and colored lights and real ladies ? I've never been there."

This remark awoke in Richard the masculine delight of studying a new woman. It would be rather interesting, he thought, to watch her vivid face in gay surroundings, so he swerved the car around towards Fiftieth Street and out on Broadway where he soon came to a stop in front of one of the gayest dining places.

The jazz music burst upon them as they entered the restaurant. Couples were dancing with violent swing and jerk on a small cleared floor in the center. Waiters in black uniforms hurried back and forth among the tables that glittered beneath shaded lamps. Dazzled, Fantine drew timidly behind Rich-

ard who fearlessly motioned the distinguished looking head-waiter. Recognizing the son of the old millionaire, Martin Stanborn, the waiter moved rapidly towards them, but as he caught sight of the bare-headed, disheveled Fantine, he paused, unable to retain his conventional composure and his keen black eyes betrayed surprise. The girl's quick eyes noted the unintentional betrayal, also the smirk with which the man turned and pompously led the way to a table. She determined not to let Richard know that she was aware of anything unusual in her appearance and tilted her head proudly. With her best swagger she followed him.

Richard had not missed a move on her part. Diligently he centered his attention on the menu and ordered an elaborate meal. When he again looked at her he strove valiantly to conceal his mirth. Her eyebrows were raised superciliously. In an instant she had copied the mood of a woman sitting at an adjoining table, with an interrogating pose of her head and languid droop of her shoulders. He laughed. Fantine's big blue eyes filled with tears.

"Please, please, don't laugh so loud," she begged, "I haven't any hat on."

"Oh, bosh the hat. It's your eyes I'm looking at. I don't see any further." And then, intentionally, Richard held her glance, felt the full magnetic force of its power, a consciousness of the emotion that swayed him towards her. In him there awoke a passionate desire to smooth gently the gleaming touzled hair, to hold her to him, see reflecting from her eyes a look of perfect trust and understanding.

Fantine, conscious of his enveloping gaze, trembled slightly as she felt the unspoken caress acknowledged in his eyes. Through her inner soul she formulated a sudden desire to become worthy of Richard's admiration.

The music struck up once more and the different couples crowded the dancing floor, moving in rhythm. Delighted, Fantine watched them, her face aglow with enthusiasm. Richard was lost in admiration of her features. Neither of them was conscious of a man standing close by watching them narrowly.

"Good evening, Mr. Stanborn, I saw your car outside—" the man hesitated, then decided to speak frankly. "I took the liberty of coming in, because I want to ask you—" He paused again, his attention centered pryingly on the girl. She, hearing his voice, turned her head quickly and perceived Richard's embarrassment.

"What is it, Mr. Kennedy?" Richard filled in the pause.

"Is it too much to ask for an introduction?" Dare Kennedy questioned.

"Miss, Miss—" and Richard, who had not been able to obtain any knowledge of the girl's name, turned scarlet. He strove in confusion hurriedly to fit a name to the girl. The detective waited.

"Fantine Avenel," she spoke, without caution.

"Avenel? Miss Avenel?" Dare Kennedy repeated, hastily gathering his thoughts. He surmised that Martin Stanborn had been more keenly alive to the danger of such a friendship for Richard than he had cared to reveal fully during the interview. Where could Richard have formed

this acquaintance which he openly acknowledged in a public restaurant ? Friends of Mr. Stanborn were likely to see them, wonder and talk. Hurriedly he put two and two together. The whole thing looked rather shady to him. It became his imperative duty to dally no time away but to warn Martin Stanborn that he had traced and found the girl.

After exchanging a few words, Dare Kennedy bid the two good-bye. Fantine's beauty had made its genuine appeal. It was with a sense of regret that he left the table, feeling himself obliged to inform his employer. He hastened into a telephone booth and made connection with the Stanborn residence.

"Mr. Stanborn, this is Dare Kennedy."

"Yes ?" abruptly spoke Martin Stanborn over the wire.

"I have just seen the girl we spoke about this morning."

"Yes ?" came the response, slowly and distinctly.

Somehow Dare Kennedy felt himself weakening. He recalled Fantine's features.

Her face was both innocent and beautiful. How could one associate her with crooks? But he knew he was employed to protect the interest of the Stanborn firm and answered directly. He named the restaurant, slowly spoke the girl's name: "Fantine Avenel. She and young Mr. Stanborn,—I have just left them dining together. Yes, I am quite sure she is the woman's daughter. There is a resemblance to the photograph."

An angry, incomprehensible ejaculation reached his ears, then:

"Shadow her. Crush her. She must not enter Richard's life." And the conversation was abruptly cut off.

Dare Kennedy lingered near the telephone-booth undecidedly.

"Shadow her. Crush her." Martin Stanborn's words echoed in his ears. He would have to follow the girl carefully to get evidence against her, but his was not to be an easy conquest.

Love, a combating power, laughed softly at Martin Stanborn's command to destroy.

"Fantine Avenel," Richard spoke under his breath, again in his car, as he leaned

towards her tenderly while she sat comfortably back beside him, covered with the soft fur lap-robe. "What a lovely name!"

In the soft light of night her big eyes looked up at him. Aglow with the pleasure of the whole evening, they shone like deep sapphires.

"You like my name?" she hesitated, leaned back luxuriously in the warm robe, and added, "Richard?"

"How do you know my name?" Richard's voice was both tender and surprised.

"Your father called you that at the camp."

"What a quick little mind you have!"

And Richard, as he sat beside Fantine in the darkness felt himself carried away with an impulse he could not have explained. He wanted to drive away to some far place where they could never be discovered, where he could claim her in freedom as his own. Love became a whirlwind and Richard was caught in the breath of it. Then the thought of Muriel raced through his brain to torment him. He sighed deeply.

Fantine heard the sigh but was too unsophisticated to understand its portent. She

had not yet been taught by life the cruel distinction which exists in modern society between the sons of the rich and the daughters of the poor. To her Richard's sigh meant the contentment of a young man satisfied with his position in life, free from a struggle for existence. He was the first man to arouse in her the desire to correct her speech and to cultivate the refined mannerisms which might place her to advantage before him.

Close beside her, Richard sensed her emotion. In the silence she seemed to become more intimate,—to awaken in him a protective sense. He wondered if she had ever known the lack of food or the need of clothes sufficient to keep her little body warm.

"Fantine," he spoke boyishly. "I would like to see you dressed in the prettiest clothes money could buy, to see you groomed perfectly from head to foot. You would cause a set-back to those beauties who winter at Palm Beach."

"Is Palm Beach very beautiful?"

"It just misses," Richard answered, hurriedly. "Oh, it's well enough, but I like Maine better."

"What is it like?" Fantine was curious about Palm Beach. She had seen pictures in the Sunday papers of society men and women with their dogs and children on the sand and had longed for a well-cut bathing suit like those advertised for Palm Beach wear.

"Well, there's a beach, and plenty of bathing and palm trees and lots of dancing, and flowers, and pretty girls who are all anxious to get married to the richest man in their set."

"Are you going there this winter?" And Richard missed the slight tremble in Fantine's voice.

"Why, yes. It's quite the usual thing. Dad has a place down there."

"And what do you do?"

"Oh, give house parties—and dance."

Fantine sighed.

"I wish you hadn't told me about it. Now I want to go there. I hate—"

"What is it you hate?"

"The dirty street where I live, and the noise; never any pretty clothes—well, you see, the only pleasure I really have is the thrill of being like my father. He wasn't afraid of anything. I want things to be different. I'd like to be on a hill-top now just like I was when I was lost in the mountains. Palm Beach must be wonderful."

"You'd like to go there,—and break in?"

"Well, how do girls break into society?"

"They must be born to it, inherit it, or sometimes talent does it. And sometimes marriage. But their clothes are the most valuable asset. Some girls go there to set new styles afloat."

"Well, I've got the shoes." Fantine laughed as she lifted one foot, displaying Muriel's shoe to his gaze in the moonlight.

By this time they had neared 168th Street on Riverside Drive where the giant rock body of Manhattan rears itself. Below a steep ravine the Hudson River lay like a mirror reflecting the brilliant orange and gold electric lights from the Palisades on the opposite shore. The full moon seemed pale, almost lost in competition with the adver-

tisements flashing across the river. Richard stopped his car. The soft night enveloped them; the stillness thrilled them. Fantine's voice broke the stillness.

"It's almost as beautiful as the woods. I didn't know New York was so wonderful."

Richard became certain that a stronger emotion than a mere desire to protect this girl moved him to follow her words and thoughts attentively. He touched her shoulder lightly.

"Look, down the river !" He pointed south. Gigantic apartment houses loomed from the New York shore like battleships reflected in the water.

"How many little people are asleep down there !" she meditated.

More and more Richard became fascinated. Evidently this little piece of humanity had never had her chance in life.

"How long have you lived in New York ?" he questioned.

"Why, ever since I can remember." She looked away from him and watched the flickering lights on the river below.

“ I’ve never seen the city so beautiful ! I didn’t know all of this——”

“ What ! Do you mean to tell me you have never been this far north in New York, that you have never seen the Hudson, nor been over to Palisades Park ? ”

Fantine was slightly angered by the question.

“ There are lots of people in this city, if the rich people only knew it, who only see the dirty little part of the town they live in. They only hear the quarrels of their neighbors. You people up town read about the fights in the newspapers, I guess, but I know all about ours, because I hear and see them. Sometimes there are excursions,—picnics, but my mother won’t let me go. But I do run away to the beach. I have never had time to see the Hudson. The Chinese take an excursion up it every summer. It’s exciting. Sometimes white girls go ! ”

“ You are a mystery of New York,” Richard mused, wondering how best to advise her. She revealed such an innocence of mind that he began to fear for the outcome of her

misapplied freedom. He decided upon a direct question.

“Fantine, why were you in the Adirondacks?”

Fantine felt her cheeks burn.

“That is a very impolite question. It was important business. It all seemed right when I went; even my mother’s objections made it seem the righter. But now—well—since I met you it all seems wrong, somehow—to wreck trains.”

“Wreck trains! Holy Mackerel! That surely wasn’t your mission. You are joking! Why, I found you most peacefully asleep!”

“Well, I lost myself. And perhaps I did dream it all. I wish I had never met—never met *him*!”

“Who’s that?”

Fantine thought of Guerre and the memory brought her back to caution. The unusual pleasure of the evening had made her careless. Guerre would not hesitate to skin her alive, she thought, after having been of such little service to him, if she betrayed him to a rich man. She was glad Richard had

taken her remark as a joke, and decided to laugh it away.

"Someone I like specially." To her this answer seemed to cover two points: Loyalty to Guerre and the necessity of answering Richard.

"Young ?" Again Richard took her off guard.

"Oh, no. My father's best friend. He wants me to be like my father. Everybody in Paris loved him. He was so brave. That's why I like danger. I don't want to die on a quiet bed. I want to be shot."

"There's a better way to face danger than a mad escapade. There's plenty of danger at Palm Beach !" Richard said, thinking of Muriel.

Fantine looked away from the river and north towards the rocks and oak-trees overhanging the gigantic cut in the road.

"You are so primitive, Fantine,—you belong to the woods." Richard leaned towards her. Playfully she retorted:

"Will you build me a house in those trees ?"

Above them on the bluff hung a few disconnected houses, their small back-yards built up on piles of rock among the dark trees. Smiling in the mingled moonlight and electric lamplight on the Drive, she fascinated him. He wanted to confess to her how much she enchanted him.

“Fantine”—he leaned nearer.

“What is it?”

“You are a wonderful child, dear! You know, I have been like a big school boy just out of college, fishing around for something to do. There is no worse fortune for a man who amounts to anything and who might achieve things than to come into a lot of money with ease. A man needs inspiration—of struggle or of love—fully to awaken him.”

“I don’t understand! It must be lovely to have a lot of money and not have to worry.”

He leaned nearer.

“By inspiration I mean someone to work for! Well, now, I’ve found you, and you’re it! Everything seems different in my life. I’d like to be able to start at the beginning

with you by my side—and be my own boss !
And some day, who knows,—but—you Fantine——”

Then Richard, unable to control the wave of love he felt surge within him, unable to withstand the upheaval of emotion which this slip of uncared for humanity awoke in him, gathered her impulsively to him and held her fast in a tender embrace. Fantine laughed softly as he kissed her. Richard was all propriety again.

“ I should not have done that. You should have slapped me ! ”

“ Why ? Because you kissed me ? ”
She was too truly a child of nature to attempt any dissemblance of her emotion.

“ Oh, just because—well, I had no right to kiss you, that’s all.”

“ Right ? But of course it must be right to kiss if one loves,” she reasoned. “ I liked your kissing me. You are the first young man that has ever—” and then Fantine checked herself. A deep crimson flush which Richard did not see burnt on her cheeks, for suddenly she knew it had not been just the correct thing to allow. Richard had taken

a liberty and the full meaning of his words flashed through her. She trembled, unable to explain her confusion, and covered her face with her hands.

"I want to go back. I want to go back."

"Back where, Fantine?" His voice was all tenderness.

Fantine thought hurriedly of a hotel. The first name that struck her fancy she uttered:

"Oh, back to the Waldorf. Drive me there." She forced a smile.

The car moved on towards the southern Drive which elaborately arched below them. The trees and rocks were forgotten; the stone porticos were passed one after the other as they glided on into the wide stretches of the Drive. From the abrupt turn at 72nd Street they moved into the traffic of Broadway and were soon at 34th Street. Fantine alighted in front of the large red-brick hotel at the corner of Fifth Avenue and waited for Richard to join her at the wide doors.

"Good night, Fantine." He spoke softly.

"Don't follow me in." This admonition seemed uncalled for.

Richard was fully aware that she did not reside there and knew this to be only a ruse on her part that she might not be forced to tell him where she lived. But if this was her little secret he did not feel called upon to pry into it.

"I will see you again soon," he said, as he took her hand and held it. It would be just like bringing up a child to develop her adventurous spirit. This thought awoke an instinct in Richard which was both altruistic and self-satisfying.

Fantine looked up at him. "Love at first sight," she thought. Surely it was only love which could cause that gentle warmth to stir in her heart and make her pulse beat faster and faster. She gave his firm hand a little squeeze.

Interested, Richard watched her whirl in through the revolving doors.

CHAPTER XI.

Forced to walk home through lack of car-fare, Fantine's heart was light with a new found joy. The instinct of love awakened, formulated a desire to leave behind her all that would seem unattractive in Richard's eyes. Feminine intuition told her that a woman who gains a man's respect wins a deeper love. Those two wonderful days she had spent in the woods had changed her whole outlook towards life. Just two days, but her soul which had been stifled in the dark hole of an East-side tenement, with her first glimpse of the open sky and depth of woods, the clean breath of nature, had become aware of a new beauty in life.

She recalled the sweet wonder of her night in the woods when she had been enveloped by the caress of nature. Like the wonder of a dream had come to her vision the starlit expanse of a night sky in the open, so different from the glimpse of topping sky above

the tall buildings of Fifth Avenue. The God her mother prayed to, she thought, must have protected her and brought her back.

No more mad escapades! . . . Guerre must be put out of her life, she decided; he must be forgotten. But even with this conclusion she realized what a power she had permitted him to gain over her. Guerre could not be easily dismissed. As she turned from the vast canyon of wealth towards the whirlpools of poverty adjacent to Third Avenue her problem seemed to become more difficult. This was the part of New York she belonged to. How could she, a mere girl, ever break the spell of such an environment? But she determined, cost what it might, to face Guerre and sever this association. She decided to tell her mother the truth, to explain that Guerre had gained an influence over her by appealing to her sense of danger and desire for adventure. Her mother would understand and help her to break this bond, but, no sooner had she formed this decision than she realized that it would involve exposing Guerre to her mother, and possibly to the police. It would

mean betraying Handsome Mike and Bennie. Guerre had instilled in her the meaning of her father's words: "Stick to a pal even if in the gutter. Face death rather than betray him." If she should confide to her mother it would be equal to a betrayal of her father's ideals. This she could not do. There must be another way. But before she had decided what this way was to be Fantine had reached the steps of her home.

The idea of facing her mother tormented her. She felt a tugging at her heart. She recalled that it was Saturday and that she had forgotten to call at Uncle Ikie's for her week's salary, the insignificant sum which he paid her and which she always took home to her mother. Fantine turned the knob to the door of her flat. It was locked. She hesitated. Then the key was turned on the inside and the door opened carefully. Fantine was swiftly enclosed in her mother's arms. A tear from her mother's eyes dropped on her cheek. Tenderly Rosalie murmured over and over:

"My little baby."

Fantine kissed lovingly her mother's eyes, speaking in French:

"Tiens ! Tiens ! Petite Mere. I am here. I am safe."

"But where have you been, Fantine ? I have been so worried !—"

Eager to break this strain, Fantine reassured her mother hurriedly and, leaving no time for Rosalie to question further, she entered her small bedroom. The jetting gas flickered dully ; the white coverlet of the bed was turned down ready to welcome her. It did not take her long to rid herself of her clothes and slip into bed, heaving a sigh of contentment.

Rosalie followed her into the room quietly. About to extinguish the gas, her gaze turned towards the bed. The tasseled curls of Fantine, the babylike curve of her cheek caused the mother's heart to swell with pride. This beautiful girl was her baby, her little Fantine ! Unable to restrain her emotions any longer, Rosalie gathered Fantine to her bosom.

"Fantine," she cried, "Fantine, oh my little baby, where have you been? What have you been doing?"

Impulsively Fantine arrested her mother's words with a kiss and, throwing her arms around Rosalie's neck, hugged her tightly.

"There! There! Mother, don't worry. I have decided I am going to be good. I am not going out late at night any more, I am not going to worry you. I am going to be good."

"You have always been that, dearest,"—Rosalie's voice was tenderness itself.

"Oh, but now I'm going to be a lady—a real lady. I have met a young man, he's tall and handsome and wonderful. He's a gentleman!"

Over Fantine's face lit such a smile that, had Richard seen her then in all her tantalizing beauty he would have molded her expression with his kisses into a serious mood.

This revelation was a new shock to Rosalie.

"But Fantine," she ventured, "who is he?"

Rosalie felt that this was the first time since Fantine had reached maturity that any outsider had touched the girl's soul. She trembled at the thought of an intruder.

"Oh, he's big and strong and fine, answered Fantine, sitting up in the bed. "I want to be like him and not like Guerre. Tomorrow I'm going to get up early and get myself a real job ! I'm going to get myself a lot of pretty clothes—and you, too—dress you up like a lady.

"But, Fantine, clothes don't make a lady !"

"Oh, maybe you think they don't, but I do ! I've seen some real ones tonight, with silk dresses, furs around their necks and jewels on their fingers ! But I never let on to him it was the first time I had seen them. Oh, so many electric lights ! One in every nook of the room. And music, real music ! Not an old tin-pan piano !"

Fantine ducked back in bed once more, thoroughly satisfied with herself.

"Fantine, where have you been ?" Rosalie was stern.

"There now, Mother, you mustn't question me ! See, I can't keep a thing to myself. If I let you question me a lot of things will come out that I mustn't speak, so you must let me alone and help me—by not asking any more questions !"

"Ma petite," Rosalie murmured. "I am glad that you have chosen to devote your hours to real work. Fantine, the world is very beautiful for those who go about honestly and do their duty. Yes, my trust in you is complete. I shall not question."

"I am going to be Fantine Avenel, and make you proud of my name, too !"

Rosalie strove to conceal the tremor within her when Fantine made this assertion. The childish features of her daughter set into a stern expression, the eyes gleamed with the same fire she had so often beheld in Leon's eyes and Rosalie knew that all of Leon's impulses surged through the blood of Fantine. She realized the battle her daughter's nature was brought to face in the slums; the evil influence of her associates, the constant exposure to danger. Rosalie decided to be more tender, still more patient and to culti-

vate a greater understanding of the tempestuous personality embodied in her daughter.

As Rosalie bent her head over Fantine to caress her she saw a flood of soft light gather in her daughter's eyes. The girl drew her mother's head close to her own and held it for a moment on the pillow.

"There, come mother, I am your baby. Won't you sing while I go to sleep?"

For a brief moment Rosalie hesitated. Then her low contralto voice filled the room with its soft tones:

"Do do l'enfant, dors."

Fantine cuddled in her mother's arms. Rosalie's eyes were moist, but hers were tears of gratitude, for as she held Fantine in her arms, it seemed as if her little baby nestled there once more.

"Do do l'enfant, dors

L'enfant dors

Do do l'enfant dormira bientôt."

The mother's voice rose, thrilling with love. It seemed to her as if she were singing thanks to God. Fantine's breathing became slow and regular. Rosalie caught the lisp once more: "I am your baby, mother."

CHAPTER XII.

October with its golden tints had passed; November with its whirl of withering leaves had gone; but the song Autumn had awakened in Fantine's heart was not dead, for, closely knit to all her endeavors to obtain fitting work had been constantly held the thought and hope of meeting Richard once more. Three months of effort had been crowded with revelations of genuine delight and joy to both Fantine and her mother. She had not found it difficult to obtain work. Her slight little body easily met the requirements of the wholesale clothing manufacturer to whom she applied for a position. Fantine laid her success to the fact that she had worn the shoes Richard gave her, and that her expensively shod feet had attracted the manager's attention. It was true but, added to this, was the self-reliance with which she stepped. If he had noticed her

feet he had also appraised the luminous intelligence of her eyes.

In her new surroundings Fantine readily acquired a manner all her own, though slightly fashioned after the pattern of the girl models with whom she mingled in her work. She had learned to value the beauty of her hair and combed it in imitation of the simple style displayed in the window of an extravagant Fifth Avenue hair-dresser. She also studied the colors that became her best, and many a night her mother retired late after finishing a garment made from carefully selected remnants, bought at a bargain counter and skillfully designed by Fantine from the models which daily met her gaze in the store. But always interwoven with these activities was the memory of Richard and the desire for his approval; the anticipated pleasure she would experience when she could return his smile without a sense of inferiority.

She insisted on moving, for who knew but some day Richard might accompany her in his racer to her door and she must have a fitting home in which to receive him. So,

while Fantine was at work, Rosalie had explored for new lodgings in and out of all the tenements on the lower West Side, as Fantine insisted they must reside west of Fifth Avenue. Finally her daily search had been rewarded, and Rosalie obtained possession of a small flat on Commerce Street, not far from Bleecker, which locality delighted Fantine. Her dream of luxury was to ride on the Sixth Avenue Elevated instead of the Second.

Happily they had settled in their new home, Rosalie's deft fingers scrubbing, cleaning and transforming an ordinary tenement flat into an attractive place. But Rosalie worked with a light heart, for she treasured each moment of drudgery, marveling at the change in Fantine which each night at home revealed. She was exalted in the hope that Fantine was genuinely attempting to realize her better self in honest work. To the mother's eyes that never missed a mood in her child, Fantine was blossoming with the same beauty of light with which her beloved fields of poppies in Flanders had responded to the sun.

Guerre, who seemingly with a smile had accepted Fantine's renunciation of friendship with him, certain that the change was caused by some romantic influence, keenly watched every move, although appearing to let her drift her own way for a while.

"The blood of Leon Avenel courses too fully through Fantine's veins that she should remain contented long without any real excitement," he confided to Handsome Mike. "She is bound to come back, and when she does, all this polish she is acquiring will be of great advantage in our undertaking."

Then they were both glad to have her out of the way, for the turn of events due to Larry's capture as the murderer of Jack Benson had put them under the surveillance of the police. Fearing that any day Larry might confess and involve them both, Handsome Mike and Bennie had obtained work, and Guerre reasoned it was best that Fantine, on her own initiative, had made this change.

On her way home at night Fantine always chose Fifth Avenue, ever hoping to catch a

glimpse of Richard in his racer, but this never chanced to happen, and it was the only disappointment in the happy routine of each day which she strove to conceal from her mother's eyes. But if Fantine did not meet Richard personally, she daily indulged in dreams wherein she wove all kinds of chance meetings, of long talks, of pleasurable rides with him. If she skipped up the stairs she never seemed to be by herself when entering her home, for in her fancy Richard was ever behind her, with exclamations of delight at meeting her mother, and admiring the hand crocheted doilies on the backs of the two red plush chairs, decorated so carefully by Rosalie.

At night she fell asleep dreaming of Richard and recalling the thrill she had felt in his arms when he had kissed her. But finally, afraid that Richard was unable to find her, she mentally pictured him going through all forms of endeavor to locate where she lived. This strain told on her nerves.

On one of her free Saturday afternoons Fantine decided that she simply must have tea at the Waldorf. If Richard was attempt-

ing to locate her she felt sure that he spent many hours there, that being the last place he had seen her. To her own delight, but much to the discomfort of Rosalie, this tea took place. Fantine sailed in, fearless, ahead of her tremulous mother, and chose a conspicuous table, ordering an unnecessary display of pastry, lingering over each sip of tea, her eyes fixed on the wide glass doors of the dining room where any moment Richard might appear.

Furtively observing her daughter in these surroundings, Rosalie realized for the first time that Fantine was not one of the many, but, rather, bore herself with an air of one born to luxury and wealth. The mother prayed that this might come into the girl's life honestly, that the haunting shadow of Leon Avenel would forever vanish from Fantine's visage, but Fantine only longed and prayed to meet Richard once more.

Though Fantine smiled as they left the hotel, she paused at the entrance a little longer than was necessary and Rosalie wondered what hope haunted Fantine.

Homeward bound, mingling with the masses on the crowded Sixth Avenue Elevated, Rosalie's heart ached as she perceived the smile on Fantine's features fade into a pathetic little droop. The mother longed to question, but, true to her promise, remained silent. But the events which are to unfold and develop our character are bound to come even into the most prosaic lives and eventually make them dramatic. Fantine was to meet Richard again, but not as she had anticipated, and not in the joy of her new found existence.

One morning as Fantine entered the wholesale store where she worked, the manager met her at the door, saying: "I no longer need your services here." The girl's heart sank. "Hurry to Madam Dufre; you are wanted immediately. I have made arrangements for you to work in her shop." And now Fantine's spirit soared with happiness.

She had heard Madame Dufre's name whispered with awe amongst the girls with whom she worked; she knew it to be the

most expensive shop in New York, catering only to the most exclusive set.

A new vista opened for Fantine; a new world seen through aisles of richer gowns, of pleasanter occupation in velvet carpeted rooms as she displayed the models for Madame Dufre's approval.

"Yes, that will do; you are partly French, aren't you?" Madame Dufre questioned.

Fantine responded eagerly in French: "Oui, Madame,—ma mère est Française."

"Your French is good enough. You are not to speak to any of the girls at any time in English. You are an exclusive French model and will wear only our imported gowns. Now hurry! Get in line. The maid will assist you with your change of costume."

All of this was accepted with delight, and, joy in her heart, Fantine told her mother of her change of position and increase in salary. During the following week she readily fell into the routine of exhibiting gowns—marvelous, spun silk garments and metal laces—for the judgment of those whose pocket-books could well afford the exorbitant prices that were charged for such array. So,

little knowing what it would mean in her future, she donned exquisite creations, dainty organdies trimmed with laces, ribbons and artificial flowers more beautiful than any her little fingers had worked on in the dim past; extreme velvet bathing suits for the coming season at Palm Beach and, in her estimation, of too rich a material to be immersed in salt water; evening gowns cut low over her slim shoulders and youthful, modeled back, bare to the waist. Slowly she paraded, stepped on and off the platform, stood poised, her head high, her curls held by a huge jeweled comb. Finding delight in this task assigned to her, all unsuspectingly she exhibited these costumes to the estimating approval of Mrs. Winthrop Mason and her daughter Muriel.

Fantine noticed Muriel the first day she entered the shop. She admired the soft gray velvet dress that gowned her, and felt certain she could so describe this costume to her mother that without difficulty Rosalie would be able to duplicate it with little cost. Even as she stood there, a tremulous smile on her lips, the thought of Richard held her

imagination and she almost fancied she could hear his exclamation of delight when he should see her so arrayed.

Calmly, coolly calculating, Mrs. Mason and Muriel made their selection. They chose the soft pink creation she was wearing.

"That will be charming on you, Muriel, for your last party!" Mrs. Mason spoke in a low tone.

"Oh, yes." Muriel seemed almost indifferent. "And the organdies will be quite the thing for Palm Beach. But my heart is really set on that chinchilla and silver-lace cape."

The conclusion of the conversation she did not hear. She watched Muriel light a cigarette casually. Madame Dufre's solicitous efforts to impress them with the value of the fur cape failed to decide them. Mrs. Mason cut her effusive remarks abruptly short.

"Send the pink dress and those three organdies right away. I see no real necessity now for a cape. We are going to Palm Beach. However, we will think it over. If we decide on it, we will phone and let you know."

That night as Fantine hastened home she decided to stop at a Travellers' Bureau. Her

delightful face peered over the counter and smiled at the busy clerk, who readily answered her questions as to Palm Beach. He quickly extended a pamphlet with timetable containing photographs and descriptions of points of interest. Hugging it tightly to her breast with little gloved hand clasping the beaver fur collar of her coat as she walked, head down against the bitter winter wind, she wondered if Richard could be at Palm Beach.

That night she fell asleep studying the pictures and reading the miraculous words that described this playground of millionaires where he told her he spent his winters.

Two days later, just before closing time, Madame Dufre, aflutter, called Fantine.

"Mrs. Mason has decided on the cape and asks that it be sent to her immediately. The order has come through so late I find we cannot deliver it, unless you will be kind enough to do so for me. I do not want to take a chance of losing the sale—tomorrow morning she may change her mind—so I will order a taxi for you. Please deliver it, but be sure you obtain a receipt."

Happily Fantine was driven rapidly through the uptown traffic. A butler in livery ushered her into the Masons' home. Sounds of gay laughter and music reached her ears as she followed him up the stairs. He requested her to wait a few moments and explained that Miss Mason was busy entertaining guests. Alone, Fantine inspected the luxury of the second floor library. She opened various books, amusing herself with turning from picture to picture. Again the strains of laughter, music and gliding feet reached her up the stairway. She fell to wondering just what it would be like to be Muriel Mason and live in this perfectly appointed home with absolutely nothing to do but give parties and dance. It must be entrancing, she thought. She moved to the window and noted it was growing dark. The hour must be near to her supper time. She felt hungry. It was all right to be made to wait on the rich but not to go without food for them! She decided to find the butler and get her receipt for the coat. More distinctly the laughter and voices reached her as she descended the stairs. The door to the main

parlor was now open. Leaning over the banister she craned her neck and peered into the dazzling room. She saw men—such handsome men; she saw girls, pretty girls in lovely party dresses. Snatches of conversation reached her ears. Then amidst this bevy of young people she saw Miss Mason wearing the soft pink silk gown she had modelled. Yes, it became her! How poised Muriel was!

Fantine wondered who the man could be who so held her attention. She wished he would turn his face so she could see him. As if in answer to her wish the man turned. She could not have said that he captivated her fancy—he was far too old, and not a bit like Richard!

Then his name was called: "Ward Kingsley!"

Fantine's whole being trembled. That was Richard's voice that had spoken—that rich voice with a laugh hidden in it! Spellbound, she followed Ward Kingsley with her eyes while he moved to the center of the room. Yes, there was Richard! He had stepped forward, too. She wondered what they were

doing, and she moved one step lower to see better.

There was a large mirror in the room facing her. In it she could see the full reflection of Richard and study him. How very handsome he was, and how fast her heart was beating! She wondered if she would get a chance to speak to him later.

The butler was passing long-stemmed glasses filled with champagne. Fantine leaned further so as not to miss a move.

Kingsley stepped forward and lifted his glass.

"To Richard Stanborn," he spoke. "Congratulations! And to Muriel, your beautiful fiancee."

Then Fantine saw Muriel near Richard. She saw Richard place on Muriel's third finger a sparkling diamond, but even as she looked she suddenly beheld a veiled look of anguish sweep his features. His eyes in surprise were riveted upon her reflection in the mirror.

Laughter. The girls crowded around Muriel. Someone played the first bars of the wedding march. The lights blurred be-

fore Fantine's vision. The figures whirled into blackness. Everything became indistinct, everything seemed to spin about her. Her trembling knees gave way and Fantine sank in a small, unconscious heap on the floor.

A door slammed. Someone carried her through space. Someone laid her gently on a huge sofa. Someone called her name very softly, tenderly. She opened her eyes and beheld, through a haze, Richard's face bending anxiously above her.

"Fantine! Fantine!" he murmured. "Oh, my darling, my darling!"

Still her senses seemed to swim. It was as if she were drowning. Richard, kneeling by her side, held her hands in his.

"Fantine! Where have you been?"

She made no answer. She was still struggling to regain her spirit that seemed to be sinking somewhere whence she could not swim back.

"Fantine, Fantine — I — I — you hear me——"

Slowly she found the breath to question: "Is she to be your wife?"

"We were engaged," Richard pleaded, "before——"

"Before you met me? Before I was lost, and you found me and——"

"Yes."

"And yet you kissed me?"

Richard trembled: "I——"

"You had no right to waken my love for you then."

"Right? Oh, Fantine, there is no right in love! There is no wrong! For days I have tried to find you, but you never gave me an inkling of where you lived or how I could reach you. Darling, can't you understand that I have suffered?"

But Fantine had become her old self once more. Fantine, who had struggled through poverty to the rightful desire of ennobling her life for the sake of love, felt herself cheated, robbed. If love was a thing that could pain—that a man could barter—then it wasn't worth striving to be good for—it wasn't worth possessing—it was wrong! The old spirit of Leon Avenel that had been asleep for a while surged through her blood, awakened; the daring Apache, hailed as the

idol of his Parisian confreres that had never been betrayed through a pal, called this slip of womanhood to revolt. Her breath came fast. Her eyes were great lights of anger.

Richard, unable to find words to fit the torrent of emotion that tore his being, only realized in abject silence that he was glad he had found her once more. Fantine, with the first stab of pain that love always brings in its wake, as if it took delight in testing the strength of one's emotion, understood but one thing. Because she was poor and unknown her affections had been aroused and carelessly cast aside. Had not Richard told her he would have liked to see her well dressed, with the best that money could buy? It was Muriel's pretty dresses, her jewels, her home, she concluded, that had won Richard's admiration. She sprang from the sofa, her arms flung wide in defiance, her eyes grey steel in their indignation, striking to his soul.

"Then hear me, Richard Stanborn! I, Fantine Avenel, will live true to the spirit of my father that feared nothing! I hate you and I hate her. She had the money to

buy the gown that I worked to show off. She has the house to receive you! The jewels—the pretty things to make her attractive. Well, I'm going to get them too! Clothes, diamonds! How,—I'll show you! I'll show you!"

Vainly Richard tried to take her hand. Fantine contemptuously brushed him aside. Breathless she ran down the stairs.

"Fantine," Richard called again. "Listen."

But already Richard heard a door slam and he knew that Fantine was gone.

CHAPTER XIII.

The late December winds that swirled through Central Park and cut with the keenness of ice had no effect on the tormented Fantine. Huddled on a bench she sat in a cramped little heap, angry at the world's treatment of her, bitterness in her heart. Having had her first effort at right doing so thwarted, Fantine, who missed the point that she had not wanted to achieve it for the pure love of separating right from wrong, but rather had set her endeavors on the hopes of a man's appraisal, did not know that, having built her altar to a mere mortal, it was bound to fall and clatter at her feet as it did, in a thousand pieces. No room for an analytical thought was left in her mind so crowded with desire for revenge. Determined to bridge the conventions that separated her from Richard, she set her active brain to work planning to obtain the clothes, the

jewels, the setting, which would enable her to move in his circle.

Slowly Fantine raised her head in the cutting wind and looked at the sky. How beautiful it was, and how swiftly those clouds swept by, urged on by a great power, just as were her thoughts! She was the daughter of Leon Avenel! . . . She would show Richard and Guerre and Handsome Mike just what she could accomplish alone.

"Father, father!" she whispered to herself. "I am going to be like you, afraid of nothing!"

It was a wind-battered Fantine that crept her way, hours later, through the breaking dawn, to Guerre's old apartment, and stood before him, trembling.

But Guerre was wise enough to accept the unusual hour of arrival as a conventional occurrence. He furtively watched her tear stained, tormented face.

"Dear child," he spoke, as he drew Fantine into the room. "You have come in your trouble to your true friend."

"I know it, Papa Guerre," Fantine answered, glad of any show of sympathy that

might ease her present hour of conflicting emotions.

"Guerre, I want to get into society," with a ring of positive determination in her voice, Fantine spoke, "and I have got to have money to do it!"

As Fantine relaxed her tense body, sitting back on the old, dusty couch, Guerre, anxious to know just what had happened to swerve her back into the career he had outlined for her, lost no time in questioning her.

"Has someone hurt you in whom you put your faith, Fantine?"

From under her long lashes Fantine looked at him, marveling at his quickness in surmising this. Yes, someone had hurt her with a wound that still burned in her heart. She decided that if she could not trust him wholly, she would tell him sufficient of what had occurred to enable him to assist her.

"You are wasting your time sneaking into houses. I want to walk right in through the front door; I want to have a lot of pretty clothes, whole trunks full; I want to be better dressed than she was; I want to make him sorry every minute of the time! I want

to gamble big stakes. I want to land into society and take his breath away!"

An evil flame of delight shone on Guerre's face. He turned his back that Fantine might not detect it. This was just the thing he had hoped would happen. Once let Fantine become bitter and she would be easy clay in his hands—he could mold and direct and exploit her to his fullest desires. But he must not frighten her, he must not seem over-anxious, he must seemingly play into her hands and win her confidence. So, with studied indifference, he gathered a warm robe and threw it over the shivering body of Fantine. Then, appropriating a chair, he sat in silence facing her.

In the semi-darkness of the room, relieved only by the flickering flare of the oil lamp on the table, his eyes focused on her magnetically. He commanded her silently to relax her thoughts to his and to abandon her will unto his own.

"Fantine," he spoke, "is it a particular man you have in mind?"

Through the drowsiness that overcame her, Fantine struggled against her desire to

speaking Richard Stanborn's name. Guerre knew her thoughts as if she had spoken them. If there was no willingness to respond to his hypnotic influence it must be because there was love in her heart for the man. He decided to abandon this lead.

"If you will not tell me his name, has he any special friend you may chance to know?"

Unaware that she was answering, Fantine nodded her head.

"Name him."

"Ward Kingsley!"

"Describe him."

Unconscious of her words, without her individual consciousness on the alert, Fantine proceeded to describe Ward Kingsley to the dominating Guerre.

"Have you ever met him?"

"No."

"Have you seen him?"

"Yes, last night. I saw him——" tremblingly the words came from her mouth, "——saw him——when he said: 'Congratulations, Richard Stanborn, and to Muriel, your fiance.'"

Silence lay between them once more. Guerre's breath came fast. His eyes held Fantine with a grip of steel light while he commanded that her body abandon itself to sleep, but that her mind should remain on the alert to his will.

Dawn was slowly tinting the sky, and its pale yellow reflection flooded the room. Guerre sat quietly, steadily watching Fantine. The ambition that Fantine was to surpass her father in her achievements was to be realized. Yes, she must enter that circle of society, the elite. Once placed there—ah, what use he would make of her! . . . So Richard Stanborn was the name of the man who had hurt her! . . . Then Guerre mentally roused the girl's sleeping mind to thrill with the adventure he was mapping out for her.

Directly he spoke unto her mind: "You will meet this man Ward Kingsley. You are to win his confidence. Through him you are to strike his friend, Richard Stanborn. Through him you are to obtain the position you desire. You are to obtain the clothes you want. You will awaken his jeal-

ousy. I want you to laugh at Richard Stanborn."

Under the robe that covered her, Fantine turned uneasily. Her lips responded in an automatic laugh to Guerre's suggestion. To Guerre this was a sign that she was fully under his influence once more; that he had recovered the ground he had seemingly lost and that from this hour onward Fantine would obey him implicitly.

Feeling that he had accomplished his purpose, Guerre extinguished the lamp and pulled down the shade, shutting out the daylight.

Moving to the dusty table, he picked up a worn telephone book. Here was the name. Ward Kingsley, residence, address. The rest would be easy. Then, lighting a small oil stove, he slowly prepared some coffee.

It was almost nine o'clock when Fantine felt Guerre bending over and gently awakening her.

"Come," he murmured, "we must waste no time. Here, drink this coffee. You must change that coat you have on. It's too elab-

orate. Open the closet and choose what you want."

Fantine did as she was told. From the closet she drew out an old, worn garment that once had been a stylish street suit, which, before reaching Guerre's possession, had seen its way through the shop of many a second-hand dealer.

Entering the cubbyhole that served her as a dressing room, lit by the skylight through which she had once made her escape from Guerre, she hurriedly changed her costume. As she did so she glanced to the skylight she had once smashed through. She noticed that it had been repaired, and wondered why Guerre had not mentioned it, not realizing how completely she had broken from him in the last three months, and that he had had little opportunity to reprimand her.

Expressing his delight at her appearance, Guerre praised her ready wit. In the worn suit and rusty hat Fantine gave the complete impression of an abandoned, ill-treated girl, who had managed somehow to retain both innocence and purity through poverty and suffering.

Out in the cold sunlight Fantine followed Guerre without a word. He stopped a taxicab. As he shut the door after them he spoke:

"Here is the number, Fantine. I am going to drop you within a block of the house. You are to ring the bell. Permit no objections from whomsoever answers it. Enter and make your way into Mr. Kingsley's presence. The rest is up to you. I'll see you at your mother's house tonight."

"I understand. I'm to play that I'm sick, or fainter, or something." Fantine laughed brightly.

"Remember you are Leon Avenel's daughter. You have the same spirit your father had. The same dauntless courage. Let nothing stop you."

At the appointed street corner Guerre motioned the taxicab driver to stop. Fantine alighted and Guerre drove on.

A wistful smile played over Fantine's features as she mounted the steps of Kingsley's residence. She rang the bell several times impatiently. A much astonished butler answered the summons, followed by a still

more astonished housekeeper. Fantine lifted her eyebrows in her most supercilious manner.

"Mr. Kingsley," she demanded imperiously, much after the same manner of the society women she had heard say: "I will take this dress; deliver it immediately; charge it."

"Yes, he resides here," answered the butler in marked English accent, "but your name, Miss?"

"Tell him I am waiting."

The butler smiled as he closed the door behind him.

"Who shall I say, Miss?"

"Never mind, he will know me." And Fantine, brushing the bewildered butler and housekeeper aside, made her way deliberately through the wide library door.

The room that greeted her eye was lined with wide bookcases stacked with well bound books. Rare stuffed birds of rich plumage filled each available shelf above them and seemed almost alive in the dull light, which scarcely penetrated through the heavy velvet draperies half drawn across the windows.

In the far end of the room a man was seated, head bent, deeply engrossed over some drawings and papers that covered the table in front of him. Fantine recognized him. It was Ward Kingsley. She sensed the room and the man she had to deal with in a glance. "He must be fond of birds—and nature." Very cautiously she shut the door after her without making the slightest noise and tiptoed across the carpeted floor; she stood facing the thought-absorbed Kingsley, who never raised his head and seemed totally unaware that anyone had entered the room. Her voice broke the encasing stillness about them.

"I—I have had nothing to eat for three days——"

Surprised to hear someone speak, Ward Kingsley looked up. What a rare little being his eyes encountered, and what a delightfully pretty face. But her clothes! How impossible! Why, she looked like a bruised bird—but one meant to sing, not to suffer.

"Bless my heart, neither have I had my breakfast. Suppose you stay and eat with me, now that you have flown in."

Fantine opened wide her eyes and turned their full beauty on Kingsley. A weak smile played about her lips for a second and, as if lacking strength to move further, she settled herself in a chair at his elbow. Kingsley's heart smote him. He studied her. How faint her breath was—almost that of an exhausted bird! Could it be possible that such a beautiful child should so find itself abandoned in a city like New York? Less well cared for than his beloved birds she seemed; at least nature provided them with shelter in the open. He moved to the door.

“Steve,” he called through the hallway, “serve breakfast up here for two.”

Turning back, he perceived Fantine lost in admiration of one of his cherished stuffed birds. He noted the tenderness with which her hands caressed the smooth gray surface, the sweet expression of nature love on the girl's face as she bent her cheek over the soft feathers of the long neck.

“You like my birds?” he ventured, as if speaking to a little child.

"Like them?" and here a note of genuine admiration lifted her voice, pitched to the truth.

"They are wonderful! It must be beautiful to see them fly against the blue of the open sky."

Kingsley thrilled, for, through this simple statement, Fantine had won her way straight to his heart. At last he had stumbled by an accident on an enthusiast over birds, a ready listener, no doubt, to their peculiarities and habitat.

Later, when the butler entered with a well laden tray, he discovered the two deep in conversation, drawings spread about the table, pages of manuscript before them.

"This," he heard Kingsley speak, his voice trembling with emotion, "is a love bird. It flies over the snows of the arctic region."

"But surely it has a nest to sleep in! I haven't even got a nest. My father was the son of a Seigneur—a nobleman in France. He was killed upholding—I came to America as an emigrant. I have tried to work. Oh, it is all so horrid!"

"Why, my child," Ward Kingsley patted her in a fatherly way on the back. "I have always felt I have not done my share in the great world's war. I have been too absorbed in my birds!"

Fantine had not mentioned the war, but Kingsley's next remark cleared his meaning:

"If you will permit, I shall start right now doing my first bit to help the sufferers. You shall be my little war-bird. The bluebird from Belgium has flown clear across the Atlantic and shall make its nest in my home."

Steve interrupted them. "Waffles and coffee, sir. Anything else?"

"A glass of milk for the little girl, Steve." Then, turning to Fantine: "Ah, come, my child."

The old bachelor cleared away his papers and motioned the girl to be seated beside him. As Steve stepped out of the room subserviently, he heard the young voice of Fantine exclaim:

"It's snowing outside."

"But you have brought sunlight into the room," Kingsley answered, as he switched on the electric lamp above the table.

"Yes, the sunlight," he repeated, as he caught sight of the many golden glints in Fantine's hair.

"To help warm your birds and make you forget they're only stuffed," Fantine answered, as she threw her old velvet hat on the floor and helped herself liberally to waffles.

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CHAPTER XIV.

On the yellow sands of Palm Beach that met the blue waters of the Gulf Stream, fanned by the soft breath of the Atlantic, the pleasure seekers of America lounged back contentedly, observing the more energetic who found delight in the morning swim. The warm mid-winter sunshine cast its unrivaled rays upon the beach and streamed through the orange, blue and red parasols, blending their reflection of light into more subtle tints upon the sport costumes of the girls and men who reclined nonchalantly beneath them.

An aqua-marine sea threw its white caps to the sun, caught in its embrace girls in gay bathing suits and covered them with foam. The laughter of children rang clear in pure joy at play in the open, heedless of the cautioning remarks of their watchful nurses and governesses. Men in scant bathing suits ran down the beach and dove con-

fidently through the incoming waves, eager for a refreshing dip after their morning golf. Society matrons, sedately at ease in beach chairs, encircled the panorama of bathers grouped on a small stretch exclusively reserved for the enjoyment of the social elite, from the extensive length of a marvelous tropical, palm fringed beach.

All seemed glad to be at Palm Beach once more and greeted each newcomer they chanced to know conventionally, but withdrew with cold, haughty stares from any social invaders. They gossiped to each other the latest scandals, divorces, winnings and losses of the previous night at the Beach Club.

"It is our duty to keep all upstarts from our set," spoke a corpulent, bejeweled matron in an elaborate embroidered white dress to her companion. "We cannot permit Palm Beach to become common."

This was said with a smile on the lips but a dead-fish stare in the eyes as she looked past and beyond Fantine, who, face aglow with health and youth, stepped out of the surf. Clad in a short gray velvet bathing

suit that glistened blue with sea water and outlined her lithe form, loosening her purple bathing cap and freeing her curls, which fell about her shoulders in an encircling light, she paused on the sand.

"My dear, who is that young person Kingsley drags about with him? Has he explained her?" This remark was uttered low, but quite loud enough for Fantine to hear it.

"Very forward, my dear! Very forward!" spoke the companionable spinster, a withering woman who had once been a beautiful bud presented to society but never plucked, and who now found herself, through reduced circumstances, in the present position, eagerly accepted as it enabled her to criticize the rich sojourners to Palm Beach by name.

"Really, I was forced to resent his lack of ethics. He simply was determined to thrust her acquaintance on me at the Beach Club last night. I was compelled to cut him short, and he is such a romantic old dear. So fond of his birds! He has the most valuable collection in New York! Muriel was quite

daffy about him two seasons ago. We all thought it would end in a marriage, but now I hear she is engaged to marry young Stanborn. He can't count his father's millions!"

"Are the Masons coming down this season?"

"Oh, my dear, they arrived yesterday. Mrs. Mason would quite as soon lose her false teeth as miss a chance to display her daughter's gowns. Besides, it's four seasons since Muriel made her debut."

The glow of a crimson umbrella passing caught Fantine's cheek and hid the flush as she moved away to escape from hearing more. She had been far too happy during the last two weeks since arriving at Palm Beach to permit such petty gossip to mar her pleasure. At the farther end of the beach she approached Ward Kingsley, who immediately separated himself from a group of men in knickerbockers with whom he had been talking. Fantine gave him her most bewitching smile.

"And how did my little sea bird enjoy her dip this morning?" he questioned.

"Great!" Fantine answered. "Almost too good to be true. I can't believe it's me."

Fantine's trip to Palm Beach had come about very easily. On that memorable day a little over two weeks ago, when she had entered Kingsley's home and had so won her way into his heart with her ready acceptance of his pet hobby, he had talked long about his birds, the country and his travels. Fantine had listened. Finally she asked him: "Have you ever been to Palm Beach?"

"Palm Beach? Why, yes—I go there every season."

"Are you going there this winter?"

"What am I thinking of! Why, yes—of course! I am leaving——"

"Oh, then I have only found a nest to lose it!"

"Why, my child," Kingsley had been solicitous, "I see no reason why you should not come along."

It had been like a dream, and quite simple to dispose of her mother's objections. Rosalie believed Fantine was going to Palm Beach to model gowns for Madame Dufre.

The daughter of Leon Avenel smiled as she recalled the natural assistance of fate which had enabled her to obtain this trip and yet retain herself true to her mother's code of honor.

"You are far too young to know that we must abide by the laws of society, and too pure to understand how evil minded some people are who have no genuine interest in life. So, my dear little girl, do not feel that I am slighting you when I make you quite comfortable at the hotel and reserve my rooms at the club," Kingsley had said.

In the comfortable, steam heated Pullman car Fantine had watched the snow covered stretches of New Jersey disappear behind them as they sped South. At Washington she had caught a glimpse of the huge white station and the Capitol through a veiling snow. With each hour that took her through Virginia and further south, all tremor she might have felt at the risk of her undertaking melted, for Kingsley had been only courteous and fatherly in his manner.

"You should say 'It is I,' Fantine!" Kingsley corrected, now bringing her

thought back to the beach. "There, my child, run along! That fat lady in white has been making quite frantic signs to me for the last five minutes. What a nuisance she is. Birds never permit themselves to increase so abnormally in weight. They have more appreciation of symmetry. I really must find out what she wants."

Fantine's glance followed Kingsley as he walked away to join the stout matron whom she had heard so crudely condemn her a while ago. An infant furrow played between her eyebrows but was soon dispelled by a smile as she caught sight of some children at play.

A warm arm was slipped lovingly around Fantine's waist and the blue eyes of Bobbie Stuart from under his shock of maize colored hair looked up questioningly into her face.

"I saw you first! Come on, Fantine, let's play." And Bobbie jumped gaily along the beach, dragging Fantine after him.

"And how is the bump this morning?" she questioned, as she stroked the lad's head.



"Oh, it's all well now. You helped make it better with that cold water you put on it last night. It was good you came into the hotel just when you did. Let's build something in the sand."

Soon Fantine was deep in her play with Bobbie and had built, to his delight, a big sand castle. Peals of laughter floated from her as they piled interesting structures only to tumble them and start over once more.

Without a word Mrs. Stuart joined them. Fantine was about to greet her, but already the young mother, dragging the reluctant Bobbie by the hand, had placed such a distance between them that Fantine would have had to shout in order to be heard. Her face saddened. She could not understand this attitude on Mrs. Stuart's part. Only last night at the hotel the mother had been profuse in thanks when Fantine had bathed her son's forehead and stilled him to sleep. But this morning she was not even accorded a courteous greeting. Struggling to banish the tears that formed in her eyes, she arose and turned in time to behold Ward Kingsley approach, and beside him, Muriel Mason. Glad that her

bathing suit fitted so perfectly, Fantine smiled quickly.

"Ah, there she is, my little blue bird of passage," Kingsley spoke in his kind voice. "Miss Mason, I want you to take under your protective wing Fantine Avenel."

The smile that greeted Muriel was the brightest Fantine could master. No one would have suspected that her heart was fluttering at the introduction.

Muriel hurriedly appraised the shapely limbs and bright smile of the girl facing her, realizing that the best way to protect herself from any suspicion of jealousy in Kingsley's eyes and to gain his sympathy was to appear to acquiesce with his request. She extended a jeweled hand in greeting.

"How charming she is, Ward!" Fantine believed she could detect a quaver of insincerity in Muriel's voice, and remained silent.

"I am giving a tea at the club this afternoon," Muriel continued. "Will you and Miss Avenel join us?"

The beach was now nearly deserted after the mid-day exodus, when society hurried to partake of dancing on the Breaker's Porch.

Fantine's heart throbbed fast. It seemed to choke her, for she perceived beyond Kingsley and Muriel a figure wending his way toward them. He paused, and by that brief hesitation Fantine knew that Richard Stanborn had recognized her. A few more steps; Richard was facing her.

"What kept you so late, Dick?" Muriel's gay voice was speaking. "I want you to meet Miss Avenel. Can't you induce her and Ward to come to my tea?"

Somehow Richard managed to murmur: "Why, yes—surely."

Fantine, with a *savoir-faire* far beyond her years and experience, did not disclose with a twitch of her lip or the droop of her eyes that she knew Richard so well, but accepted both introduction and invitation quietly.

The four strolled leisurely up the deserted beach, which only an hour before had been crowded with the wealthiest citizens of the United States.

"Get dressed, Fantine," Kingsley spoke. "We will be waiting for you at the Breaker's Porch."

"Maybe Dick had better wait and bring you to us, then you will be spared the annoyance of searching for us in the crowd." And Muriel looked up at Kingsley for a rewarding smile. She was certain that her solicitousness for the girl pleased him.

Smiling, Fantine hurried up the steps of the Casino and entered the bath house. Her thoughts ran riot! She dare not think! What would Richard say when they found themselves alone? She scampered hurriedly into her clothes, humming happily as she did so. Her determination had been rewarded. At last Richard was to see her well dressed, and she prided herself on her achievement. In her mind settled the firm conviction that Guerre was right in his teaching. Thoughts have more power than words. We attract to ourselves the thing we want if we concentrate all endeavor upon obtaining it.

As Fantine joined Richard in the mid-day sunlight, pausing a moment that he might get a full value of the picture she made in her golden-green silk dress and wide brimmed purple hat, it did not matter to her that he spoke no word, for his eyes be-

trayed that he was her slave, and told her worlds of unspoken secrets. She rejoiced in her power.

Past the golf links and under the black-green Australian pines they walked silently, conventionally rich in appearance. Both seemed calm, without more than a surface thought, but suddenly Richard stopped and spoke slowly:

“I don’t care how you came down here. I only know words can’t tell how happy I am to see you again.”

Then, just as suddenly, Fantine knew that she had been deceiving herself; that it was love, and love only, that had urged her to obtain rich clothes and seek a further meeting with Richard.

The long porch of the Breaker’s Hotel was crowded. Prosperous men, their wives,—daughters,—were grouped around small tables. Darkies rushed to and fro, with tall glasses. Loudly the orchestra gave vent to its energy as if to fill with a little more pep those who had nothing better to do than to listen and to help them to realize that, although some people might be hard at work

at distant offices, the chosen few who found themselves in Palm Beach, after a casual look at the stock reports, were free to abandon themselves to the hypnotic influence of jazz.

The gaiety of the scene filled Fantine with excitement. She skipped happily to the music, ahead of Richard, expressing her love of rhythm much as she had done—not so long ago, either—to the hurdy-gurdy on the sidewalks of New York.

Proudly Richard noticed the admiring glances of the men that followed Fantine. Couples were dancing on the porch under the shaded balcony. Fantine paused. Girls held securely in men's arms covered the small space with such rapidity that Fantine wondered where they had acquired their agility. She looked up to Richard from under her broad purple hat. Richard bent his head close to hers.

“Shall we dance?” he questioned.

Fantine was about to reply when she felt her hand grasped from behind her and a piece of paper thrust between her fingers.

"Darn it!" Richard exclaimed. "There's Muriel! Wait a minute. I'll tell her we are going to dance."

As Richard crossed the porch, Fantine, crushing the note in her hand, turned. She looked down into the dark eyes of Guerre, seated at a table opposite Handsome Mike. She was about to speak her surprise, but Guerre held her silent with a command of his eyes. Trembling with suppressed fear and indignation, she observed Guerre's well cut sport suit and Mike's white flannels. Both were drinking lemonade with well-studied indifference to their surroundings. Fantine knew it meant trouble for her. How impossible, how cruel, that they should have had the audacity to follow her to Palm Beach! She wished that she might dare to destroy the note right there before Guerre. How happy she had felt only a short while ago, but now the sunlight had faded from her heart. She was tired, sad, weary. . . . When Richard returned she refused to dance.

As they sat at Muriel's table, Kingsley wondered what clouded Fantine's face,

usually so bright. Muriel found her dull, but Richard thought her still more adorable in this pensive mood.

With a last blast the musicians brought to an end the dancing. Unheeding the applause of the persistent couples pleading for more, they folded their music and laid aside their instruments. Groups began to disperse. Amid the general rush for the mid-day meal Fantine felt safe and unobserved. She opened the scribbled message, for she could wait no longer to see what it contained. Her eyes filled with terror as she read the words:

“We have work for you. Obey. Meet me at the Poinciana immediately.”

Wondering what could have caused her eyes to cloud so with fear, Richard studied her, enchanted. How becomingly the large hat framed her face, and how well it shaded her translucent sea-blue eyes. He reached under the table for her hand, but Fantine drew it away hurriedly. It still held Guerre’s scribbled message and Richard must know nothing of her associates. With a pretty excuse she parted from her new friends, begging to be permitted to find her way to her

hotel unescorted. Richard followed her with his eyes as she disappeared. Muriel watched him shrewdly. Somehow she felt certain this was not his first meeting with Fantine.

"Such a charming girl, Ward! Who are her people?"

"Let me see. I believe her father is dead. Killed in the war."

"Is she in Palm Beach alone?" Muriel questioned, observing Richard.

"Not exactly. I have sort of adopted her. It will delight me—any kindness on your part, Muriel."

Without a word Richard rose and lit a cigarette. Muriel became more suspicious than ever. Where had she seen that girl's swinging figure before?

"Kingsley, will you lunch with us?" Richard was eager to turn the conversation away from Fantine. He knew Muriel so well that he felt certain her unconventional acceptance of a newcomer to her social circle concealed some personal motive.

"If you will have pity on a lonely bachelor, with pleasure," Kingsley accepted, as they entered the wide rotunda of the hotel,

Mrs. Mason rose from one of the large leather chairs and greeted them.

"Muriel, we are always the last into the dining room. What kept you so late?"

"Mamma, you shouldn't eat so much!"

As they strolled into the dining room, Muriel's thoughts were held to the memory of Fantine's pretty face. She felt certain that if they had seen this girl before Mrs. Mason would remember. She longed for a moment alone with her mother when she might confide her suspicions of Richard.

She wondered. Could it be? . . . Richard had acted so strangely since his engagement. She recalled how abruptly he had left the room after placing the engagement ring on her finger; how abstracted he had been during the rest of the evening. She knew how Martin Stanborn had hastened this matter—how detached and uninterested Richard had been. At times she felt during the months following the announcement, that Richard was suffering some disappointment. Could he care for someone else? Could this happen to be the girl? She dismissed this thought as improbable, yet how did Fantine

happen to know Ward Kingsley? It was all very strange. Kingsley had called her his ward. He had never mentioned any relatives. What was he doing in Palm Beach with this girl? Richard and Kingsley had been friends of long standing. Muriel decided that, for the time being, she would cultivate a friendship with Fantine, concluding this to be the simplest way to unravel her suspicions.

CHAPTER XV.

Three hours later, in a small, abandoned bungalow, half concealed from the country road by elderberry bushes, Spanish bayonettes and wild tropical growth, Fantine was facing her antagonist, Guerre.

With a loud laugh Handsome Mike taunted her: "Didn't I say it? She's white livered! Never be a bit of use to the gang except to get us into trouble."

"I've got more nerve in my little finger than you have in your big, stupid body!" Fantine stamped her small foot on the uncarpeted floor of the scantily furnished room in which she stood facing the two men defiantly.

"Shut up! Nothing has been said to make you angry!" Guerre said.

"Oh, maybe you don't think so, but I don't agree! I came down for a good time, and managed to get it, too, and right in the middle of it you plant yourself flat with Mike

and his stupid face and try to break it all up. You drag me to this horrid old bungalow and won't listen to reason!"

"And we are going to keep you here," Guerre answered slowly, "until you promise to do as I command."

"I won't! I won't! What are you going to do about it?" Arms akimbo, defiant, Fantine faced Guerre determinedly. Pleased at her display of temper and opposing will power, Guerre remained silent. His gaze traveled over the bare floor and walls of the bungalow he had chosen, believing this to be a secluded spot where he could unsuspectedly speak his plans, certain that he would not be overheard. It would not do to let Fantine slip away from him at this critical moment. If he once relinquished his control over her he would fail in his chief ambition. Kindness, he felt certain, and mental suggestion, would be the best method to employ in imposing his will. He addressed Mike gruffly.

"Take the Ford and go to West Palm Beach. Get that motorcycle and bring it back in the car. Remember, you are Joseph Reed."

"There you go, soft hearted!" Mike accused, "trying to get me out of the way and think I can't see through it! If you would let me handle milady, I'd show her! Thinks she's in society. Wants to snub her old pals! Well, dearie, look out! That guy you're sweet on ain't sweet on you. I'll bet right now he's got some swell Jane tucked up his sleeve, and if you——"

"Oh!" exclaimed Fantine, but before this small word had escaped her lips she had leaped across the room and was furiously pummeling Mike. "Take that, and that, and that! Who said I was sweet on him?"

"Holy gee, let up, Fantine! You can't hurt me! And I ain't through what I was going to say. Maybe he's married."

"Maybe he is for all I care, but get out of my sight before I fix you so no one will ever want to marry you!"

"Cut it!" Guerre admonished. "Mike, do as I tell you. Go. Not another word. Do you hear me?" Mike swaggered to the door, giving Fantine a last sneering look before he went out.

When the sound of his automobile had died away and Guerre knew that he was alone with Fantine, he adopted a tender tone.

"Listen, chérie, who did you come to when your heart was breaking? Now, suppose you forget all we have said and let Papa Guerre tell you something that may make you think he's right."

He towered his full height above her, knowing that he was about to deliver a blow which he desired to make both effective and dramatic.

"What is the name of that young nabob who took you to the Breaker's this morning?"

"Why, Richard Stanborn."

"I thought so! Martin Stanborn, his father——"

"How do you know?" Fantine's great eyes grew wide in astonishment.

"Through his own enmity towards you. How long do you think you could be a part of Richard Stanborn's world? Do you think he would be bold enough to be seen with you if Mike or Bennie should disclose to him your identity? You don't belong to his set."

Life is cruel. You belong to the underworld. You may fight to retain the ease and luxury that have been loaned to you for a few days, but in the end it will prove futile. The rich will drive you back to the East Side—back to work in the sweatshops, or to prison, unless you trust me completely.”

Gone was Fantine’s courage. The flaming fearlessness of her eyes was now covered with a curtain of dread.

“Martin Stanborn has your mother in custody in his home!”

Fantine’s face paled.

“Richard’s father? You must be mistaken! You mean that my mother is a prisoner?”

“Yes. In Martin Stanborn’s house. Some detective saw you in a restaurant with his son. He told Stanborn. God knows how your mother ever met him, but she told me the police were after you. However, through some ruse I know nothing of, he induced your mother to meet Martin Stanborn in his home, and—well, what happened after that I don’t know—we never found out.”

Hatred for Martin Stanborn, who had been so heartless to her and who was no doubt torturing her mother, flamed into Fantin again some of her first admiration for Guerre and fired her young recklessness.

"Oh, Papa Guerre, Papa Guerre, you'll help mamma? You'll hurry back and make him release her. I'll do anything you want."

"I may need you tonight, Fantine." Guerre picked up a small black bag. "In there you will find your old boy's togs. You are to under-dress tonight and wait for me. I'll meet you at the hotel and let you know if I need you."

"I'll play game. I'll do it! Only, please—please—you'll hurry back to mamma?"

Guerre took out of his vest pocket an envelope and drew out a long, green ticket.

"Tonight, if our plans carry through, I leave for New York."

"You'll take me, Guerre? You'll take me to mother? I want to help her."

Guerre could not conceal the surprise this request on Fantine's part aroused. He felt it to his advantage to lie deliberately.

"Certainly, but only if you do just as I say, else——"

"Oh, Papa Guerre," Fantine answered brokenly, "I trust you."

Affectionately the old Apache patted Fantine's shoulders.

"There, my child. Once a pal, always a friend. You are the daughter of my beloved comrade, Leon. Now go, I'll see you later."

He closed the door behind Fantine. She stood alone on the country road, bathed by the late afternoon sunshine. Taking a narrow side road that trailed in and out of wild salt weeds and tropical verdure, she walked in the direction of the ocean. Little knowing what had caused the change in her nature, she wandered on. Somehow, going out with Guerre in search of a thrilling adventure at night had once seemed the most natural and interesting thing in her life. But now the old thrill was gone. She looked at the sky. How blue it was! In the near distance she heard the roar of the breakers as they dashed on the sand. How beautiful the fringed palms were! She paused and listened to the eternal song of the sea, wondering.

How startling the beauty about her was! It seemed to sweep into her soul as something she could not express, only feel, feel intently. Her mother must be right, only God could speak through so much beauty—only He could have made it. A robin redbreast flew past her. She caught the ruby flash of his throat. How freely he flew and paused on the swaying branch of an oleander tree. What was this power Guerre controlled her with? Why had she taken this bag? How heavy it was becoming—a burden in her hand! She felt she could go no further.

Within sight of the Ocean Boulevard and the open sea beyond Fantine sank to her knees on the overhanging sandbank and opened the handbag. Neatly rolled were her knickerbockers, black and white check coat and boy's cap, which she had worn on her first exploit for Guerre. How far away it all seemed now! She thrust her hand further into the bag. A complete set of burglar tools was partly concealed by her clothes. Knowing now for certain that Guerre wanted her to carry through an illicit undertaking, her control gave way, and she burst

into tears, sobbing aloud. Believing that no one could hear her, she abandoned herself to her grief.

A gentle hand was placed on her shoulder. Beside her, half kneeling, Muriel was bending solicitously.

"There! There! What has caused you to cry so?" Muriel's voice was kind. Already Fantine's hand had shut the bag and had drawn it behind her.

"It was nothing you would understand that made me cry," Fantine explained, as she rose to her feet. "I loved my father so much—and he is dead. He used to give my mother large bags of gold—he had so much——"

"Come! If he left you plenty of money you have nothing to worry about!"

"Oh, no," answered Fantine. "Only I was terribly lonely."

"There! I'll drive you to the club. I was on my way to meet Mr. Kingsley. I had some trouble with my car and stopped to locate it. Then I heard someone sobbing and looked about and discovered you."

"But my hat!" exclaimed Fantine, recalling that she had left it at the bungalow.

"Oh, never mind your hat!" Muriel answered, as she descended the sand dune. "Did you walk all this distance alone?" she continued, as she stepped up into her car.

"Oh, no; I rode part of the way with some friends and left them."

Then, eager to divert the conversation from herself, she added:

"How well you drive!"

They sped over the yellow road below the vivid green fringed dunes, skirting the blue sea that was lost in the bluer sky as it met the horizon. Finally Muriel swung her car off the roadway and swerved up the approach to the club house, a large frame structure with wide veranda that fronted the ocean. At the broad steps of the entrance the car came to a standstill.

Ward Kingsley had seen them approach and descended the steps to assist them. Richard, back in the shadows, watched Muriel alight and wondered at the sudden show of intimacy with Fantine. It was not rudeness that kept him there, but rather

deep concern which weighed upon him, for upon reaching his hotel at noon he had come face to face with his father's private detective.

"I am sorry, sir, but Mr. Stanborn sent me to Palm Beach. That young person, Miss Avenel——"

"Leave Fantine Avenel alone," Richard had hastily interrupted.

"Your father believes that this young woman is entangled with a band of crooks."

"That will do!" Richard's arm had stiffened, ready to strike.

"I must tell you, sir, that I recognized her from the photograph which you asked me to develop some time ago. This girl used to work in a pawnshop where the gang hung out. Your father knows it, sir—he has asked me to tell you——"

"Kennedy, you had better return to New York and tell my father I am well able to take care of myself. As for Fantine Avenel, forget you have ever seen her, or you will have me to reckon with."

Now, as he watched Fantine, the late afternoon sunlight playing on her hair, the soft

breeze that played from the sea outlining her supple figure in the folds of her golden-green silk dress, he felt for certain that Kennedy must be mistaken. As he observed her his attention sharpened.

Fantine refused Kingsley's assistance. With a deep flush of embarrassment she swung the small black leather satchel behind her.

"Oh, leave it in the car," Muriel remarked.

"No." In that short refusal there was both fear and decision.

As Muriel ran up the steps, followed by Fantine, instinctively Richard extended his hand to relieve her of the weight of the bag.

Their eyes met. He saw a look of suspicion and fear flooding the green-blue depths of her eyes. Then, with a gentle droop of her head, she relinquished the bag into his keeping, asking, as she did so:

"Will you check it?"

"Certainly." Richard was surprised at its weight.

"This is Miss Avenel, Jose Venendez," Muriel called with a blase indifference, adopted as the acme of polish.

"Do you dance, Miss Avenel?" Jose Venendez, in a low drawling voice and broken English accent, addressed Fantine.

"Yes, but perhaps I have never——" She was about to betray herself and add, "to good music."

"You are too wonderful to be timid," Jose added with Cuban politeness. Curiously wondering at the strange familiarity of his features, Fantine looked at him.

"You are not an American?" she questioned, with a lift in her voice.

"No, I am a Cuban, but I live in the States. I have a studio in New York."

It all flashed back to her memory. That night of her first undertaking when she had climbed ten flights of a fire escape, pried her way into a beautiful room and dropped off to sleep. Yes, it was in that room she had seen his photograph. Hesitatingly, her heart fluttering, Fantine accompanied Jose into the main parlor. To a table by a large window that opened on a view to the sea,

Muriel led her guests. Fantine's light body swayed, as she walked to the rhythm of the darkies' jazz music.

"It's a half tango," Jose murmured. May I lead you? "

Uncertain, yet longing to dance to the syncopated melody, Fantine permitted Jose to lead her to the center of the room, curved gracefully unto his experienced guidance. From the width of the doorway Richard watched them. His anxiety became suffused with jealousy. Why had he permitted Dare Kennedy to rouse his suspicions? How slender, how innocent she looked!

Then curiosity and an overpowering urge caused him to abandon his post. Hardly conscious that he spoke, Richard addressed the clerk in the check room.

"The bag, please, which I just checked!"

Nervous with the suspicion prompting him to search another's possessions, Richard sought the seclusion of the side veranda. Falteringly his hands opened the bag. He drew out a small boy's cap. His hands burrowed deeper into the bag and encountered something cold and heavy. Hastily he

brushed aside the knickerbockers. A gimlet, file, hammer, acetylene torch and flashlight, met his curious gaze. For a moment his hands covered his eyes. He was lost in painful thought. Could it be that Dare Kennedy was right? . . . No! . . . No! . . . Not Fantine! There must be a mistake somewhere. "She's only a child," he murmured to himself. Yet, he puzzled, why had she been so reluctant about telling him her name at first? What about the time she was lost in the woods? "To wreck trains." Her careless words flamed back to his brain. No! No! . . . She had only been playing a game. She was only a child—but who were the friends she had been afraid to mention when he had asked how she had gotten lost? Why had she not told him where she lived? He had hunted for her daily; had tried to find her. He, Richard Stanborn, loved her—loved her with his whole being!

"God," he prayed silently. "Not her—please, not her! . . . She is too beautiful, too perfect, to be a——" He could not permit his mind even silently to form the word "thief." Come what might, he swore that

he would protect her. He must not let her suspect that he was acquainted with the contents of the satchel, but would return it immediately.

Once more he stood in the broad doorway looking into the room. Fantine's laughter, spontaneously denoting her youth, floated to him. Eagerly he reached her side and whispered:

"The next dance is mine, Fantine?"

Fantine, smiling, answered, "Yes."

Through the open window Richard and Fantine looked out on the sea and sky colored pink with the afterglow of sunset.

CHAPTER XVI.

Alone in one of the small card parlors of her hotel, awaiting Kingsley's arrival to escort her to a dance at the Poinciana that evening, impulsively and playfully Fantine arose from the large easy chair where she had been reclining. Admiringly she looked at the glistening, iridescent evening gown she wore, and then, lifting her head high with the air of a dressed-up child, she extended her hand to an imaginary guest.

"Yes, I am Mrs. Richard Stanborn." Opening her large amber handled, Nile green feather fan, she spread it wide across her smiling face and swept to the floor in a graceful courtesy.

"Perfect, Fantine. You are an adept student!"

Almost tripping in an effort to regain her balance, upset by the sudden voice of Guerre, Fantine's skirt caught in the jeweled buckle

of her shoe and nearly caused her courtesy to end in a disastrous fall.

"I was only pretending that I was——"
Fantine was embarrassed. "I was only passing the time, waiting for Mr. Kingsley."

"And I was just in time to witness your display of fine feathers."

That strange, warm course of her blood through her veins which she always felt under Guerre's magnetic observance was pulsating once more through her body. Fantine strove in vain to dispel it. Resolutely she squared her shoulders, saying: "There, now, Guerre, speak what's on your mind and don't spoil my whole evening."

"It is your good I have in mind. Have you underdressed as I suggested this afternoon?"

"Can't you see from the way my dress fits that I've done nothing of the sort?"

"Careless!" Guerre exclaimed. "Go to your room and bring me the satchel."

"But why, Guerre?"

"I want you to." Guerre held her eyes steadfastly.

“Oh, all right, then!” And Fantine hastened angrily out of the room. Guerre’s thoughts followed her. How beautiful—a lady to her fingertips! The daughter of Leon Avenel coming into the possessions that really belonged to her!—with the wealth of a new world to conquer! He had himself to congratulate on having so fully developed the latent qualities of her father in the girl with her new position in society. She fitted perfectly into his plans for the coming night’s undertaking. She would readily escape all suspicion.

Fantine’s return arrested his thoughts.

“Here it is, Guerre. Take it out of my sight!”

“Not so fast, Fantine. You are to meet me at the County Road at eleven-thirty. Remember! Two blocks north of the railroad crossing.” He took the bag hurriedly, for through the open doorway he had perceived Richard Stanborn walking toward them. With assumed indifference he departed, but not before Richard had a full view of him and the satchel which he carried.

Here was the whole problem of Fantine's reticence to speak solved. This was the friend she had feared to mention—this was the evil influence in her life. That was the bag he had searched. The young American longed to strangle the foreigner with his bare hands, but controlled himself. He realized that he must do nothing rash and expose Fantine to gossip, or, worse still, Dare Kennedy. He must speak to her alone and warn her. Later he would find a way.

Richard stood by Fantine's side. Broken was the spell cast by Guerre; forgotten were her troubles.

"I have come for you, Fantine. Muriel cornered Kingsley for a game of cards and suggested that I take his place." Then, smiling boyishly as he looked at her, he added: "I jumped at the chance."

Daintily lifting a soft green wrap from a nearby chair, Fantine smilingly walked by his side, proud to display her escort, so handsome in his evening clothes, to the cutting glances of the women who so annoyed her.

Under the palms along the waterfront Fantine and Richard rode comfortably in a

spacious pushchair, propelled by a uniformed negro, surrounded by the rare beauty of a Palm Beach moonlit night, a million stars gleaming in the sky, the soft breeze from the ocean swaying the black-green branches above them, pushing the fronds together with a swish which is like music to nature lovers. The two were silent through the stretches of cultivated gardens leading to the Poinciana.

On the high, wide extension of the veranda, controlling a view of the cocoanut grove below, within hearing of the music, and in sight of the waters of Lake Worth, Richard leaned leisurely against the railing, lost in admiration of Fantine. The green cape had slipped from her shoulders, revealing the perfect, slender curve of her neck.

"Fantine, you are beautiful," he spoke.

"So is Muriel," she answered, spreading the feather fan gracefully, half concealing her smile, while her eyes peered up at him tantalizingly. He resented the reference to Muriel, whose swiftly spoken words of anger that afternoon had permitted him to feel the sharp claws of her jealousy directed at Fan-

tine. Now as he looked at Fantine she seemed even more feminine, more fascinating than ever, and Richard drank in her beauty.

"Come," he spoke. "We must join Muriel. But, dear, tonight I must get a few words alone with you. I want—I must speak to you."

Long lines of colored lanterns interwoven in the palm trees surrounding the dancing floor greeted Fantine's vision as she came into her surpassing dream of fairyland. Soft music floated through the air. Couples moved slowly to its rhythm as if, under the spell of the moonlight, they had lost that love of speed so energetically displayed on the Breaker's Porch at the noon hour.

Courteously Kingsley rose from a table under the palm trees which, like feathered pillars, canopied the sky. Muriel greeted Fantine and introduced her to Mrs. Mason. Fantine felt uncomfortable under the older woman's scrutiny. Muriel seemed highly excited. Bordering on rudeness, she denied Richard any form of greeting, but resumed her interrupted conversation with Kingsley.

It was a relief to Fantine to see Jose approach and to hear him request a dance.

When she returned to the table after her dance a silence had settled upon the party. After polite thanks and profuse praise of her ability as a dancer, Jose departed to join some friends at a nearby table.

Mrs. Mason's eyes sharpened as she observed Fantine shrewdly. She was attempting to recall Fantine's face. She was certain that Muriel had been right in her surmise. Some deep-rooted attachment of longer standing than a day's acquaintance caused this light of adoration to shine in his eyes as he looked at her. To her observance, Richard was changed. He no longer seemed the irresponsible boy he had always been, but now had the look about him of a man. What an expensive gown the girl wore, and how it became her! Why, that was the gown she had hesitated about buying for Muriel because of the price. Now she recalled the girl's face. This was the little model they had seen at Madam Dufre's. She was certain of it, but it might be wise to have a few

words alone with Muriel. She touched her daughter lightly on the arm.

"Muriel, if your friends will excuse me, I just remember that I have a letter which I must mail tonight." Turning to Kingsley and Richard, she added: "You will both pardon me if I take her away for a few minutes?"

"But, mamma!" Muriel did not want to leave Fantine alone with both men.

"I just remember, daughter, a little question you asked me this morning."

Muriel's expression changed to interest. Once more ignoring Fantine, Mrs. Mason spoke: "Come, Muriel. You are so capable I don't know what I would do without you."

As they departed Fantine smiled, a little bit worried.

"Did I offend Mrs. Mason or say something I should have kept back?"

"What put such an idea into your mind?"

It seemed to Fantine as if Kingsley's voice had lost some of its kindness.

"She cut me so completely."

"Tut, tut! That's only her way. She reminds me of a large black vulture, the way

she pries for trouble! But there, you are a song bird and must be happy."

Richard was deeply moved. Someone had hurt his darling. How he longed to be free to speak! The music started once more. Richard was eager to get Fantine away. His arm safely encircling her waist, she abandoned herself to the joy of dancing, but Richard's one thought was to find an opportunity and lead her away to where they would be alone for a moment.

Enclosed by waving palms that seemed to form a lattice through which gleamed the starlit sky, they glided slowly to the music, a splendidly mated couple. The admiring glances of many men and the endless curiosity of debutantes followed them as they moved in such perfect unison. Fantine felt Richard's breath fan her ear.

"I simply must speak to you alone. My launch is moored at the dock. Will you come?"

Hardly knowing that she answered, Fantine murmured, "Yes."

They passed out through the garden entrance, avoiding Kingsley and Jose,

The full moon had risen. The boat sped powerfully over the glimmering waters of Lake Worth, leaving behind them the panorama of the Royal Poinciana Hotel between the palm trees, spreading its huge wings over half a mile of garden. The breeze from the ocean beyond it caught the strains of orchestra music and floated them softly across the lake.

Richard looked at Fantine. Her face was lifted to the sky as if she were lost in prayer. How best, he meditated, could he speak that which worried him, shape his words so as not to offend her? As he pondered, Fantine's joy burst from her in the soft laugh of a child.

"Richard! I am so happy, so happy!"

At the mere sound of her voice Richard thrilled through his whole being. Richard was lost.

"Fantine," he whispered, as he turned off the motor and let the launch drift. Fantine raised her translucent sea-colored eyes to his brown ones. Richard trembled.

"There's nothing will keep you from me! I love you, Fantine, I love you!"

“ And I you, Richard.”

“ There are millions of faces in the world, millions of eyes, but from out of this maze only one pair of eyes strike their message home; awaken the soul in a man! Yours is the face, Fantine, to which my whole life must sway in abeyance. Yours are the eyes to which my whole soul responds.”

Lowering her head she closed her eyes to shut from his understanding the torment that haunted her. A picture formed in her vision; her father, the Apache, who, though even of glorious courage, by his past actions had separated her from Richard, so perfect, so noble, and placed her in a different world from him.

She mastered her emotion and answered in a quiet voice:

“ Richard, I am not one to advise, but—still—don't you think you should remember Miss Mason? ”

“ You are right, dear, and by your simple words you call me back to attention. God bless you, dear one! I was drifting, but you are a wise little captain.” And Richard took the wheel, guiding the launch toward the

shore. As they stepped on the dock neither noticed two shadows that moved concealed behind the palms that surrounded the wharf.

"Dearest, tonight I make a vow. Come what might, I will protect you." Richard lifted the girl's head so that her eyes could catch the depths of his soul. Striving to convey all that he could not speak, all his love forbade him to put into words which might hurt, he gathered her slender form to himself, whispering: "I love you. You must trust me." And crushing her in his powerful embrace, he covered Fantine's face with his kisses.

A loud cry of anger from the shadows of the palm trees caused them to turn suddenly. Dismayed, they beheld the infuriated Muriel and her mother.

"How dare you! How dare you! You little upstart!" Trembling with rage, Muriel pushed Fantine aside.

"Muriel, it was unfortunate!" Richard desired to avoid a scene. "Let's go into the hotel. I will explain to you."

Muriel did not give him time to argue further. Spitefully she addressed Fantine.

"You little brazen creature!"

"Muriel, dear child! Lower your voice," exclaimed Mrs. Mason. "Don't get excited. We shall attract a crowd. Why, she is beneath your notice. She is only the model who showed off those clothes I bought you at Madame Dufre's. I recognized her snub nose and insolent face. I knew her the moment she sat at our table!"

Fantine's face was burning with indignation.

"The only difference is that you have to pay for the gowns I am paid to show off," she cried.

"It is certain you never paid for the one you are wearing now out of your earnings! You common little piece of baggage!"

"Muriel!" Richard warned. He wanted to speak, to clear his darling, but restrained himself, fearing that his intervention might make things worse. Muriel was dangerous; she would spread the gossip about Fantine rapidly if antagonized.

"How dare you! How dare you!" Fantine sprang forward, ready to strike Muriel,

but Richard held back the blow. Muriel sneered in rage.

"You presume to exploit my kindness as you have Mr. Kingsley's—as you would with your wiles ensnare Richard. How dare you think that you can sneak yourself among decent people and that they will receive you! You unclean little beast!"

"Oh! . . ." Then through Fantine's being the spirit of Leon Avenel seemed to sweep, to awaken, to control her once more. Her eyes flashed torrents of reckless defiance, anger and courage. Contemptuously her words rang out in a voice that seemed not her own.

"I am the daughter of Leon Avenel, a man who feared no one!" Slower, but sure of herself, she continued: "Maybe we all gamble for a stake. You gambled on Richard. But I am certain you do not love him. Your jewels, the very clothes you wear, the money you spend, which enable you to belong to your set, as you call it—what work have they cost you? None! You are right! I do not belong to your world. I will return to my own people who love me!"

Muriel shrank to her mother's side, bound in fear of the girl who confronted her. Fantine's eyes gleamed through the soft night with the fire of an angered lioness. Her shoulders quivered. She spread her arms wide above her. A defiant laugh broke recklessly from her slight bosom. She turned, head high, sure footed, with the primeval majesty of her being, and walked past them into the shadows of the night.

CHAPTER XVII.

“Guerre, I don’t want to steal! If you speak another word to me or try to change me, I don’t know what I might do!” Once more Fantine was in Guerre’s bungalow, but this time it was midnight. She was clad in checked coat and knickerbockers, the small boy cap concealing her curls and shadowing her eyes.

“It would be different if I needed the money, then I’d carry the whole thing through. As it is, I will stick to the gang for the excitement of it!”

“Will you become the puppet of the rich?” Guerre grabbed her by the arm and shook her violently. “Will you not earn your food and the clothes you wear? That I should live to see the daughter of Leon Avenel turn coward before my very eyes!”

“I am not a coward, and you know it.”

“Then why this sudden change?”

Fantine remained silent. She would not confess to Guerre that it was her brief acquaintance with Richard and the short glimpse of the beautiful side of life which had caused this change, but Guerre read her thoughts as distinctly as if she had spoken aloud.

"It's that white-faced society chap, eh? When you met me an hour ago at the County Road you seemed to be sore about something! Well, we won't waste any words! Either you do as I tell you or I will have him disposed of like Jack Benson."

"Oh, no, no! Guerre!" came the frightened cry from Fantine. "Not him! Not him!"

"Either you go through with our plans tonight and do just as I have commanded you, or else, if you think you are too good to steal, I'll let you wash your goodness in his blood."

"Papa Guerre! You couldn't!" Fantine was terrified.

"I swear it by your father's spirit, whose faith I have never broken."

There was nothing to do but obey. Fantine knew what that oath meant. Mike was waiting in the car. Up the County Road the three sped cautiously. In her heart a torment of emotion, Fantine sank back, trying to reason. It seemed to her Guerre was right. She belonged to the underworld and there she must remain. If she should fail Guerre what evil he might do Richard. Cold, trembling, she clenched her hands, wishing that she were dead. Guerre spoke.

"Stop Mike. Here's the place. Half a mile back. You noticed the location as we passed?"

"Yep." Mike alighted and unloosened the motorcycle that was tied to the side of the car. Guerre took his place at the wheel.

"I am going to drive on for half an hour, then pick you up on my return. Remember, Fantine," Guerre spoke hurriedly, "the devil will dance at the funeral of your society dude unless you cut out your flukes!"

Astride the motorcycle Mike jumped with Fantine on the seat behind him. Swiftly they rode. The full moon had disappeared and the shadows of the palm trees had become

denser. They passed no one in the complete quietness, disturbed only by the croaking of frogs and the whip-poor-will's cry. Finally Mike came to a stop. Helping Fantine alight, he concealed the motorcycle in the bushes by the roadway.

"This way, Fantine." Mike parted the elderberry bushes and scrub pines, leading the way in silence. Fantine followed cautiously the path he made for her.

"We must keep to the jungle until we are parallel with the house," he whispered, pushing on through the thicket and underbrush. Finally he stopped.

"There 'tis. Now for a straight line and we'll come out on the garden at the rear of the house."

Fantine ventured no answer, but still trudged on after Mike. Each step she took seemed more difficult.

"Now d'you see it?" Between the black silhouette of two huge rubber trees Fantine perceived the outline of a dark house.

"Be careful," Mike whispered in a low tone. "When we get there—why, what's

the matter, dearie?" Mike had perceived the tremor that shook her whole body.

"Nothing."

"Blow me to pieces if you ain't the strange girl! All the spirit of the thing seems to have oozed out of you. Now, look here, if you're afraid, I'll go alone. You wait here. I'll come back to you."

"No. I'm not afraid, Mike. It's not that!"

"Can't help saying I see you are. Guerre's all wrong. He's wasting time on you. You ain't got the stuff! You ain't got the nerve!"

"Show's how much you know about it." Fantine's eyes flashed with some of their former light. "Stop your gabbing, Mike, and just tell me what I'm to do."

"That's better! You seem more like yourself, dearie! Back th' house, second floor, there's a veranda. I hid a rope ladder in some bushes. I go first. You wait. I swing the ladder. Then you climb up. You're a lightweight, see?"

"You're sure there's no one in the house? I see a light."

"Nope, it's all right. That's the hall light. Folks all gone to Miami on their yacht. The help's all across the lake at a dance. Guerre made certain this afternoon. Left o' that light is the old Jane's room who carries all the sparkles. If you should see someone, lay low. I'll keep watch down here. If you ain't back in ten minutes I come. Here're the tools." Mike drew from his hip pocket a small chisel, a jimmy, a flashlight and a small drill. These he handed to Fantine.

"Watch," he said. "When I whistle low, come."

As Mike left her, Fantine felt the solitude more intensely. The trees seemed to turn to black spectres with arms ready to snatch her up. The leaves of a low branch fanned her cheek. It was as if Guerre had struck her to urge her back to her former self. A wild rabbit brushed her foot as he disappeared in a hole in the ground. She shrank back frightened. Where was her courage? That she should be afraid of a harmless rabbit. . . . What kept Handsome Mike so long? . . .

"Richard, Richard, I love you," she murmured over and over to herself. "Oh, God,

give me courage. She called me a little beast and he never said a word. . . . But I love him, oh, Night, hear me, I love him. Mike, why don't you hurry? What takes you so long?"

Ah! There through the night came Handsome Mike's sharp whistle, almost that of a bird. Fantine knew he was ready for her.

Under the rope ladder she stood for a moment; her cold hands closed over the rounds; her body swung for a second suspended; then agilely upward she climbed and on to the roof of the veranda. Mike, below, lost sight of her.

Fantine bent her body to the floor and listened. She heard no sound from within. She crept cautiously on. She had no trouble in locating the window Handsome Mike had indicated. She wedged it open very carefully. She lifted it just high enough so that her slender body could slide through.

Inside the room she hesitated. It was a large, square room with four windows. Gradually her eyes became accustomed to the darkness. She could distinguish the

bureau. She flashed her light and crept to it. She opened drawer after drawer hurriedly. They were devoid of any jewelry. She paused. Had she heard the sound of human breathing? She held her breath to listen more carefully. No. It was only her fancy. She flashed the light once more, this time across the hall. Remembering Guerre's words, "If you find nothing in the accustomed hiding places always look for a small safe in the wall." Stealthily she lifted the paintings and pictures. No. There was no safe. She was certain she had not missed it. She flashed the light once more around the room. By the Colonial bedstead was a small night-table. Fantine noticed that it was heavily built at the bottom; on tip-toe she crept toward it. She knew that she must use her flashlight as little as possible, so decided to feel the surface with her hands. It was locked and there was no key. She pried it open with her chisel in the dark. She could hear the beat of her heart as her hands encountered the cold steel of the safe. She flashed her light to make certain. The noise

the drill made as she wedged the lock annoyed her. Her hands trembled as she drew out a small steel box. There was a noise behind her. Motionless, she held her half-kneeling position. In the half light she saw a dog's eyes blaze at her, then came a low growl from the animal.

"Friend," she spoke so softly that her tone seemed to melt.

"Friend, come here to me. I won't hurt you."

Wagging his tail, the dog approached. Fantine's hands caressed lightly his long, warm fur. The dog's eyes, almost on a level with hers, seemed to question: "What are you doing here?"

Lovingly Fantine pressed her face on his neck. As if he had been her lifelong pal, the setter licked her face. Her hands closed on the steel box once more. The dog drooped his head and drew away from her. A sob rose in her throat. She dropped the box to the floor. She could not do it—caress this beautiful guardian of the house and rob him. "No, no. Oh, God, no, no!" What mattered Guerre? He could kill her. What mattered

anybody? It was herself that counted. Her soul that had always been a friend to every living thing. "God, God, help me! Please help me. Mother, mother!"

Staggering, Fantine crossed the room and crept out of the window. Weak, trembling, exhausted, she joined Mike.

"Gimme th' haul," he spoke.

"I couldn't do it, Mike, I couldn't do it," and Fantine fell in a faint at his feet. Roughly, yet solicitously, Mike bent over her. After all, she was only a girl. This was no game for a woman. Quickly Mike took out of his pocket a flask of brandy and poured a small quantity through the girl's lips. His ugly, distorted face was lit with an expression of kindness, a flash of something akin to beauty.

"There, Fantine! Better? Is the deck clear?" he questioned.

"Yes."

"And the swag?"

"On the floor."

"I'll go, Fantine, you wait."

"Mike! There's a dog!"

"A dog! Holy gee, that's nothing!"

"Don't—don't kill him."

"My Gawd! The way you carry on you'd think we wuz out here takin' t' air."

"Please. For me. Just this once," Fantine pleaded. "I can't stand any more. Don't kill him."

"Oh, all right, then, buck up. Thanks for the tip." And Mike, taking a pistol from his pocket, disappeared the same way whence Fantine had come. She threw herself down on the ground and sank her face in the grass. It was wet with the dew. All fear of any creeping thing that might annoy her was gone. She wanted to cry, but the tears would not come. A howl pierced the night. The weird cry of a dying dog. She heard no shot but she knew Mike had used a silencer. Mike had killed her friend; the beautiful beast was gone, and all that they might gain possession of a paltry bit of jewelry.

Her mind was dazed. She seemed to see a thousand dogs about her, accusing her, howling, moaning. What agony she was suffering. Her whole body was aching, chilled. Oh, how had she ever believed that there could be any pleasure in this sort of a life?

Finally Mike was by her side once more.

"Steady, now," he whispered.

Back through the jungle they stole; back through the low mango bushes. Mike was almost running. Fantine tripped twice over the cumbersome roots of the rubber trees that barred her way. At last they stood once more on the County Road. Mike jerked the motorcycle from the thicket where he had concealed it.

"Steady enough to hold on?" he asked.

"Yes," answered Fantine.

Mike pushed off and started the motor. Down the dark road they sped, lifting a cloud of dust behind them. Over the noise of the motor Fantine spoke:

"Mike," she cried, "Mike!"

"Oh, what's the use, Fantine? Guerre's never seen it, but I have from the first. You ain't one of our class. Only here's a bit of my advice. Hush up about the whole thing and let him think you've done it yourself."

"But Mike!"

"Say, can't you understand that what he don't know won't hurt him? Guerre's bound he'll break you in. Later you can give him

the slip. Only tonight shut up. Let him say what's what. You do just what he tells you."

"But Mike, you've been so noble."

"I've loved y' since I first seen y' in that pawnshop." He spoke almost roughly. "I'm most glad y' couldn't go through with it! Only tonight you obey Guerre."

"I will, Mike—thanks. I'll——"

"Cheese it. I see Guerre's car."

As Fantine stepped on the dashboard of Guerre's car she clutched at the swinging door. Her head felt light. She ran her fingers through her hair. Her cap was gone.

"Step up there. Get in," Guerre commanded. "We have no time to lose." Without a word Handsome Mike handed Guerre the night's spoils.

Later, when the three entered the bungalow, Guerre addressed Fantine:

"Take off your coat and slip into your swell duds. Throw it here!"

Over her shoulder she threw the coat to Guerre and slipped on the evening gown she had worn a few hours before.

"Get into your white flannels, Mike." Mike disappeared into an adjoining room.

Guerre took from a shelf in the dark a small candle. He struck a match and lit it. It flared an unsteady glow about the room. Fantine watched Guerre as he broke the lock of the small steel box. As if painting the scene, the candle threw its low rays on Guerre's face and revealed the evil delight of his lips that parted in a smile of satisfaction. His hands drew out the string of pearls that shone with a soft pink glow in contrast to the yellow flame of the candle; then rings which he slipped half way on his fingers. There were four. A large ruby gleamed like a drop of blood. Two long diamond bar pins followed, and a lavalier on a string of diamonds. Lost in greed, Guerre whispered:

“ They must be worth two hundred thousand ! ” The evil smile that played about his features spread into light as he wet his thick lips. From his pocket he took a chamois bag fastened to a secure belt and slipped the jewels into it. From the inside of his vest he took a large safety pin, and passing it through the chamois bag, secured its contents. So absorbed was Fantine in watching Guerre that she had not noticed Mike, who

had re-entered the room, dressed as he had been that morning. Guerre spoke.

“Mike, take the box. We’ll drop it over the bridge into the lake as we pull out. Fantine, fasten this belt under your dress. I shall wire you in two days that your mother is ill. You are to bring these jewels to New York with you.”

Terror swam in Fantine’s eyes.

“We might be suspected—held up and searched on the train, but you can make use of your swell friends. Here’s where they come in handy. You’re not likely to be watched. I’ll drive you as far as the station. You can enter the Poinciana through the side entrance. If you should meet anyone you know, greet them and show them this timetable. It will explain your absence. The rest is up to you.”

Then that great pride he felt in her rose to its height as he encouragingly patted her on the shoulder. “You can get away with it. Tonight the daughter of Leon Avenel has proven herself.”

Mike smiled knowingly to himself as he preceded them from the room.

Through the lower corridors that commercialized the station side of the Royal Poinciana Hotel Fantine walked alone. The full meaning of Guerre's approbation became clear to her. This was why he had assisted her to meet Ward Kingsley and abated her mother's objections to her coming to Palm Beach.

The jewels burnt like a belt of fire around her slender waist. Their weight branded her flesh.

Entering the deserted rotunda, she cast a glance at the clerk on night duty stationed behind the long desk. He was sorting the midnight mail. Two couples passed her, returning from the Palm Room in the basement, whence the muffled sound of late music could be heard. She stepped out on the veranda and walked its length. Pausing a while above the cocoanut grove, she noted that the Japanese lanterns, which had been so brilliantly lighted, were now dim. The dancing floor was deserted. She walked down the steps to the garden and was about to call a chair-boy.

A voice below spoke her name, and Fantine forced a smiling greeting to Jose Venendez.

"Ah, *Senorita*, what luck! I am just returning from the Beach Club. Shall I have the honor of your company?"

"I am rather tired," answered Fantine. "I was just about to call for a chair to go home."

"Let it be my pleasure."

Fantine made a supreme effort to listen attentively to Jose's enthusiastic remarks about the beauty and night life of Palm Beach. They strode down the lake front and passed the railroad track. The night detective, watching the trains at the station, saluted Jose. At the wide steps that led to her hotel Jose parted from Fantine with a remark of undying admiration.

Alone in her whitewash walled room, Fantine unfastened the belt from around her waist. She heard the shrill whistle of the two o'clock train for the north as it rolled through the darkness across the bridge. She knew Guerre and Handsome Mike had pulled out; she fancied she saw Guerre's satisfied

grin as he dropped the box out of the window. Her voice was steady as she turned and spoke into a telephone on a table by her bed.

"Yes, please. My box from the safe. I want to put away my jewels for the night, thanks." She hung up the receiver. A void enveloped her mind as she placed the chamois bag in the small box which the clerk brought her. She also deposited her own wrist watch and small diamond pin which Kingsley had given her.

"Sign the receipt for value, Miss!" spoke the silver-haired nightwatchman. Fantine scribbled her name on the slip of paper he handed her.

"Value?"

"Oh, only five hundred," and Fantine wrote this figure on the duplicate slip. Then, with a pleasant "Good night," she shut the door.

The room reeled about her. The white became black and blacker. Fantine felt lost; felt herself dropping through space; something had gone from her soul. What was happening to her? What had she done with

the belt of fire? Had Guerre taken the jewels? She tried to remember. What was it that had weighed so heavily around her body? How light and free her waist seemed now! What had Richard done earlier in the evening that hurt her so terribly? Was she a thief? She wanted to laugh—no, no—to cry! But no flood of tears could wash the bitterness and suffering from her heart.

“Mother, oh, Mother, if you were only here!” she moaned, as she fell across the bed and, abandoned to her grief, prayed once more that God might hear and help her.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The brilliant yellow light of the following mid-day sun cast its warm glow over the hedge of pink hibiscus and purple bougainvillea surrounding the large Colonial veranda of the Palm Beach Hotel.

Clad in a pink sport suit and small pink hat that framed her face, Fantine descended the wide steps to the cement walk and indifferently passed the women seated on the spacious piazza behind the white columns dazzling in the sunlight. They critically watched the girl who walked slowly to the pergola overhanging Lake Worth. In one breath the breeze swept gently the cocoanut palms bordering the lake, stirred the pale blue water, and fluttered the soft pink width of her skirt. Fantine appropriated a chair and listlessly watched the children on the wharf throwing bread into the water. An eager flock of wild ducks dipped their shiny brown green necks

beneath the water, gracefully diving for the morsels.

For the first time in her life, Fantine's head ached. She had awakened late, aroused by the sunlight that flooded into her room across the bed. Slowly the whole dreadful incident of the night before had been recalled to her mind. Too late for breakfast she had hurriedly dressed and sought the morning sunshine of the outdoors, anxious to collect her thoughts, and decide what course she might take. From the pergola she could see the roadway that extended along the lake, but she was too worried to take note of the animation of the scene before and beyond her. The laughing and talking murmur of the people in the wheel chairs and riders along the bicycle path was lost in the swish-swish sound of the water against the docks.

The steady throb in her temple was intensified by the sudden voice of Bobbie Stuart, who ran to her side shrieking: "Hey, Fantine! Thieves in Palm Beach!"

Fearful of betraying herself, wondering that the news could have spread so rapidly,

"Impossible, Bobbie!"

"Aw, don't you believe me?" Bobbie's eyes stared wide open at her, astonished by her assumed incredulity.

"You just wait a while, I'll show you!" And Bobbie disappeared like an arrow in flight. Returning on the run, he waved the Palm Beach Post. "Here it is. I got the paper from the bellboy. Read it to me."

Reluctantly, yet eagerly, Fantine's eyes scanned the paper. Keeping all emotion from her voice, she read the headline:

"Daring Robbery Committed in Palm Beach. Home of Eton Maxwell Looted. Stolen Jewelry Valued at Two Hundred Thousand Dollars. Necklace of Pearls Alone Valued at One Hundred Thousand."

Fantine mastered enough poise to answer:

Bobbie interrupted: "Oh, Fantine, let's go find the thieves!"

From the veranda floated Mrs. Stuart's voice imperiously:

"Bobbie, come here this instant. Do you hear me?"

"Aw, shucks! There's Mamma, always butting in." Bobbie's little arms bound

themselves tightly around her waist. "Now I am sure you will promise to wait until I come back."

As the boy left her Fantine crushed the paper in her hands. Dread and curiosity to read further caused her to smooth it on her knees, but this time her thoughts were in chaos.

"Society Beauty, Muriel Mason, Breaks Engagement with Richard Stanborn."

The words became blurred before her vision. The paper shook in her hands. It fell with a sharp, crisp rustle to the ground. She, the daughter of a thief, had concealed stolen property; today Richard was free; today Fantine was bound. Her deed rose to confront her accusingly. Her conscience whispered: "You have put an unsurmountable barrier between yourself and Richard."

The gay panorama before her became a walled prison. She dare not go back into the hotel; detectives might be already on her trail. At the beach she might meet Richard; there was a dull pain in her heart; she found it difficult to breathe; her head ached unmercifully. Where could she hide herself? Fan-

tine's soul longed for space, for freedom, for solitude. She must think it out all alone and decide how she should act. Involuntarily her attention was attracted by a bright red canoe. Before she realized her purpose she had asked a negro chair-starter to lower it into the water for her. Paddle in hand, Fantine glided swiftly over the sunlit lake.

Once more free from his mother, Bobbie, true to his promise, returned to the pergola, but only in time to perceive the faintly indistinguishable Fantine in the distance. Tears of anger and disappointment filled his eyes. She had gone without him to look for the thief.

Bobbie strutted past the sleepy negro chair-pushers on the wharf. He looked longingly at the bicycles, wishing his mother would permit him to ride. Then he examined the low buck-boards, small, sled-like vehicles propelled by gas motor, which were lined up in a row beyond.

"W'ad y' doin' dar? Yo' jes' leave dat der red bug alone," called the colored chair-starter.

"Aw, go on! You let Fantine have a canoe! I want a buckboard! I want to get there before Fantine!"

On his way to the hotel, passing Bobbie, Richard stopped, hearing Fantine's name. He had been deeply worried. As soon as he had been able to break away from Muriel the night before he had hastened to Fantine's hotel and waited until nearly one o'clock. Then, reluctantly, he had departed, leaving a note asking her to telephone him at the first convenient moment.

"Hello, there! Where's Fantine?" Richard asked.

"I want to find her." With a flush of precocious intelligence Bobbie looked up hopefully to Richard. "Maybe he'll let you have a buckboard. You're a man. And maybe you'll take me—please?"

"But where is she?"

"Gone in a canoe to look at the house that was robbed."

Richard was anxious. "Was someone robbed last night?"

"Didn't you know there were thieves in Palm Beach?"

"No," answered Richard, who had heard no rumor of the robbery.

"Well, she's gone to find them. Let's get there before she does," Bobbie pleaded, already seated in the buckboard.

Determined to avoid all possibility of meeting Muriel or Mrs. Mason, Richard acquiesced, for Bobbie's suggestion would fill the gap of time until Fantine would return. Down the County Road Bobbie and Richard sped. Richard, more light-hearted than he had been in months, finding himself free from the promise he had given to Muriel, laughed with the spirit of a boy as they skimmed over the ground. Suddenly Bobbie tugged at his guiding hand on the steering wheel.

"We passed something. Stop!"

Richard looked back. "It's nothing but an old cap."

Already Bobbie had leaped out of the buckboard and darted over the ground. He returned waving over his head a black and white check cap. Instantly Richard recognized it. It was the cap he had seen in her bag! It was Fantine's. And then Richard

recalled her words of the night before. "I will go back to my friends who love me." He recalled the evil looking foreigner he had seen carrying that same satchel earlier in the evening. Could it be that after she had left the dock she had joined him? Fearful where this clue might lead, he decided that a laugh was the best way to cause Bobbie to relinquish the cap. He removed his straw hat and reached for the cap.

"It don't fit you," Bobbie exclaimed, with the quick observance of a child.

"What's the difference? A cap on the head is worth two in the bushes!" And he swiftly covered Fantine's little cap with his own hat replaced on his head. But under this jovial attitude he was deeply concerned, more so than he would confess to himself. He was eager to return to the hotel, and thought how best to sidetrack the boy.

"Bobbie, whose house was robbed?" He decided hurriedly on this question.

"Gee, I forgot the name."

"I don't know it either! I guess we'll have to go back and find out. So right about face!" And Richard retraced hurriedly the ground they had covered.

Inquiring at the hotel, he was informed by the clerk that Miss Avenel was not in. More worried than ever, he dashed back to the Poinciana. Here he found a telegram from his father demanding that he return to New York immediately. He bought a Palm Beach Post and read carefully the account of the robbery. The day dragged interminably for Richard. Most of the afternoon he spent in his room. He examined the cap over and over, longing to prove to himself some error in suspecting Fantine.

“Damn Kennedy!” he thought, wishing he had never searched her bag nor had seen the tools she carried. Again and again he phoned her hotel, only to learn that her mail was still uncalled for and that she had not returned. He paced the floor of the room, descended to the rotunda, returned upstairs. He felt much as a caged animal. He dare not go outside of the hotel, for any moment might come a ring from her. His anxiety piled up. He pictured his darling led away by detectives, falsely accused, branded as a common thief. What mattered? He loved her. He recalled the soft, tender curve of

her neck, the penetrating flash of her eyes, the memory of which never left him. The pride of her splendid walk! Could it be possible that such a perfect creature should—Richard's mind refused to work any further. He remembered that he had had nothing to eat since breakfast. Once more before descending to the dining room he called her hotel. Surely she would have returned. It was now nearly seven. No, still no word for him. She had not come back.

Worried beyond endurance, he folded the cap and placed it in an inside pocket of his coat. Where could Fantine be? Just as Richard was about to leave the room the phone rang. He hastened to answer.

"Telegram, sir!"

"Bring it right up." Richard was eager. Anxiously he tore it open. It was a second telegram from his father. It read:

"No delay. Must see you at once."

As if to give vent to some of his bottled up energy, Richard tore the telegram into many small pieces.

Once in the dining room he ordered profusely. When the food arrived he could

not eat. His appetite had deserted him. He found fault with the waiter, then tipped him generously as if to excuse his lack of appetite. Again in his room Richard paced back and forth, wondering what answer he could give his father. What could be the matter with his governor? Possibly he was ill. On the strength of this surmise Richard started to pack. Then in his mind floated a vision of Fantine. He recalled the sound of her vivid laugh, the gentle give-way of her body to his arms when he had held her in that too short embrace. Hastily he pulled out all the clothes he had packed. The strains of music from the Cocoanut Grove reached him through his window. People were dancing again. It must be ten o'clock by now. He moved to the telephone. He would call her up once more. No, he had better not. His persistent messages might attract suspicion to her absence. He picked up from the floor the torn telegram, attempted to piece it together, wishing he had not destroyed it so quickly and that he might read it again.

“Why can't my father make his telegrams clear and say just what he means?” Richard

started to pack once more. Then, unable to stand the repression any longer, he slammed the lid of his trunk and departed from the room.

He walked out on the veranda and watched the dancing in the Cocoanut Grove. At the same table they had occupied last night he saw Muriel and Kingsley alone.

He observed them a moment. Kingsley seemed thoroughly absorbed in Muriel. Richard smiled bitterly. He felt certain his suspicions had been right. Muriel was in love with Kingsley. He did not hesitate to conclude that the whole scene of the night before had been planned by her so as to oust Fantine, only she had not reckoned on his revolt, she had not anticipated his defense of the girl. When sneeringly she had set him at liberty and he had quietly accepted his good fortune, he knew he had left her bewildered by the turn of events. The music crashed once more. The couples crowded together for another dance. How dull the whole scene seemed to him which only last night had shone so brilliantly. His darling had walked up these very steps; had smiled at him, tilt-

ing her pretty head high. What damned cats women were! Richard cursed Muriel silently. He looked at his watch. It was impossible Fantine should not have returned by now. It was nearly twelve o'clock.

At the Palm Beach Hotel the clerk told him once more: "Sorry, sir, we have not seen Miss Avenel. Just a minute, sir, I will call her room." Then followed a moment's wait which seemed to Richard longer than the whole day had been.

"No, sir. No answer."

Richard walked out to the pergola and sat facing the lake, absent-mindedly watching the lights of the bridge cast in the water. Where could Fantine be? Had Bobbie been right? Had she really gone in a canoe? The robbery flashed through his mind once more. He drew from his pocket the cap and held it to his lips sacredly, as if it had been part of her. Just then Richard heard someone address him.

"Bless my soul if you ain't young Mr. Stanborn! I used to be nightwatchman in your father's office, sir, when you were knee-high to a grasshopper." And the silvery-

haired night clerk of the hotel doffed his hat politely. Pleased to have someone to talk to for a while, Richard fell readily into conversation.

"How's your father, sir? Well, I hope."

"I really don't know. I believe he's ailing."

"That's too bad, sir. We've all got to get old some day."

"Are you employed here?" Richard questioned.

"Yes, sir. If you'll excuse me, I go on duty in fifteen minutes."

"I think I'll follow you in," said Richard. He preferred to have someone to talk to rather than be alone. Together they entered the hotel. Silently the night clerk walked over to the switchboard and turned off some of the lights. Richard leaned over the desk and observed the rotunda. It was a spacious, oblong room with large, curving stairway. At this late hour the room was deserted.

"They're still dancing in the Palm Room of the Poinciana. Pretty quiet here!" Richard made conversation.

"Quiet folks stop here, sir."

"I see. They all go to bed with the chickens," Richard said, feeling his way toward questioning the clerk.

"Well, not everybody, sir. Now, Miss Avenel only last night came in at one-thirty, maybe later. Yes, it was almost two when she asked me to bring her safety deposit box to her room."

Richard could have forfeited his life more easily than to have explained why this disclosure left him cold. Just then the office telephone rang. Richard listened to the old night clerk answer the call with the same even politeness he had wondered at as a child.

"Yes, madam, right away." He hung up the receiver, and entering a small room to the rear of the desk, opened a safe. He removed a small tin box.

"You'll be here a while longer, sir?"

"Yes," Richard answered, hardly knowing that he did so. The clerk proceeded up the wide, red carpeted stairs.

Alone, Richard glanced about. An urge compelled him to step behind the desk; impelled him toward the safe. It was open.

Hurriedly he glanced over the number of each box. They were marked according to rooms. Yes, here was Fantine's. Richard drew it out swiftly. Actuated by a power beyond him, he forced the box open with his pen-knife. Hurriedly he tore off the safety pin which Guerre had fastened into the chamois bag. The pearl necklace dropped to the floor. He saw the rings. There was no doubt in his mind. These were the jewels which had been stolen. He heard the footsteps of the returning watchman. Quickly he picked up the necklace, and, with the chamois bag, slipped it into his pocket. He shoved the tin box back into the safe. Cautiously he stepped from behind the desk just as the night clerk returned, grumbling:

"Some people are too fussy. Never take it for granted that a man can be honest. All that talk that madam handed me." The while he spoke he placed the small box in the safe and securely locked it. "I'll bet my Sunday hat right now that all she's got in that tin box is an old rhinestone pin."

"Here!" And Richard gave him a yellow-backed bill. "Just for luck. And because I knew you when I was a youngster."

"Ah!" the night clerk beamed. "I'd know you a mile away. Always the same kind heart. I always said to my wife: 'Money'll never change that little boy.'"

In the night air, under the stars and the palms, Richard heaved a sigh of relief. His darling was safe from detection. No one could shoulder her with the guilt. Nothing else mattered to him. He loved her; he had kept his promise; he had protected her.

And so, through love, the millionaire's son had become the thief.

CHAPTER XIX.

As dawn broke over the sea beyond the point of narrow sand of the inlet, the gentle warmth of the daylight and the orchestral rhythm of the breakers awakened Fantine. She arose, shook the sand from her wind tossed hair and dress and ran over the desolate beach, glad in the full glory of a night's sleep under the stars and within hearing of the song of the sea.

When Fantine had started in the canoe up the lake, it was without thought of direction, merely an intense desire to find solitude directed her. After about four hours paddling, the inlet, with its few rude fishermen's huts distributed on the stretches of yellow sand, had invited her with its look of abandoned seclusion to rest. Now an expanse of myriad colored lights, such as can be seen only at daybreak over a tropical sea, met her vision. Slowly from under the horizon where the sky and sea seemed to meet, the sun rose

like a ball of fire and mounted the flaming sky, burst into radiance and announced another day. The sweep of the wind from across the vast sea fanned her face, the warmth of the sun bathed her with its rays, the stretches of yellow sand seemed endless, the rolling green swells of the sea as they crashed on to the shore spoke a message. Clean nature stood unveiled before her in the pink beauty of morning. Nothing dark nor unclean could hide from the searching eyes of a God that had created this! Fantine decided to rid herself of the responsibility of the jewels and return them at once to the police.

Across the narrow point of land she ran swiftly, and skillfully shoving the canoe from the sand bank of the lake, paddled through the liquid light of the water, happy in her determination to do the right thing.

When Fantine arrived at her hotel and entered her room she stood spellbound. The sight that met her eyes aroused her anger. Her clothes were strewn about in disorder. The drawers of her bureau were opened. The contents of her trunk were stacked on

the floor. Anger changed to fear when she inquired at the office and was accosted by Dare Kennedy, the house detective and the town sheriff. The New York detective explained that he had obtained a warrant to search her possessions, based on her absence and the proofs he held of her acquaintance, in New York, with men of the underworld.

The sheriff interrupted. "We beg your pardon." He handed her the small tin box. It was curiously light in her hand.

Dare Kennedy also apologized.

"All this might have been averted if I had been able to speak to young Mr. Stanborn. But as he left for New York last night and you were not to be located at the hotel since the night of the robbery——"

Indignantly Fantine cut him short. "Who hired you to watch me?"

"Mr. Martin Stanborn, Miss. He objects to your friendship with his son."

"That may be, but Palm Beach ain't New York," spoke the sheriff. "I've been telling Mr. Kennedy that we don't mix with the family quarrels. If anyone attempts to molest you further just come to me. Non-

sense! Nonsense! That robbery was too slick a job for a girl to carry through. No woman could kill a dog. I've got daughters; I know."

Fantine's heart trembled. So the death of an innocent dog had helped to clear her! As if a voice spoke, Fantine seemed to know the jewels were gone. She feared to be trapped by Dare Kennedy. She saw in his eyes the expression that seemed to say she would not be long at large. He would watch her and watch her closely. Fantine felt certain of this. But the sheriff seemed human. She would make the most of his offer of friendship. Looking straight at Dare Kennedy, she spoke fearlessly.

"Mr. Kennedy seems bound to annoy me. However," turning to the sheriff, she added, "if he should molest me further I shall accept your kind offer. I thank you. Good morning."

Alone in her room Fantine opened the box. The chamois bag was gone. Only her wrist watch and bar pin remained. She was sure it was a trap. Dare Kennedy must have the jewels. She must lose no time in delay,

but must leave Palm Beach immediately before they were identified. That Richard had abandoned her in this plight was the hardest blow to bear. She was weak, exhausted. She sank on the bed. She was hungry. Realizing she had had nothing to eat, she ordered some breakfast sent to her room. Then she called up Ward Kingsley. He was distant, cold, unfeeling. He refused to see her. She told him she wanted to leave Palm Beach.

"Oh, all right," he said. "I will send you over a ticket and the necessary funds to get back. But don't trouble me any further. Miss Mason has informed me of your disgraceful actions."

Wounded to the core of her heart, Fantine determined not to take any of Ward Kingsley's gifts, and decided to leave her rich dresses behind her in the condition the detectives had left them.

Across the bridge the six o'clock train for the north pulled out of Palm Beach. Fantine, reclining in a Pullman seat, looked out of the window. Ahead a flaming sunset cast a marvelous scarlet glow on Lake Worth. As the train pulled slowly on over the water

she looked back. Between the palm trees of the island the huge spreading Poincianna was flushed in the warm reflection which deepened as it melted into the red tiled roofs of the white pebble-dashed houses across the railroad tracks. It was truly a paradise, she thought, resting her glance on the Palm Beach Hotel, now a golden light behind the red and white stripes of the American flag fluttering above the pergola. Fantine was bound for New York. She was leaving all this beauty behind her and all the little sufferings she had there encountered. It was just as Guerre had told her. There was nothing to be expected from the rich once she had ceased to amuse them; during her whole stay at Palm Beach she had not felt once the warmth of a genuine smile such as the poor over-worked women and laborers of the East side could so humanly flash at her as she passed by.

At St. Augustine, Fantine lifted the green shade, sat up in her berth and looked out. Men and women in dark traveling costumes crowded the narrow entrance of the yellow fenced platform, passed the ticket inspector

and hurriedly boarded the train. Beyond the railing she caught a glimpse of dark blue sky and twinkling stars above the full tops of the palmetto trees cut sharp against the soft Florida night. Brushing the soft green curtains with their bodies and baggage, the hushed murmur of the travellers passing through the sleeping car, fascinated her and caused her to wonder that so many people had the money and time to travel so far from New York. The movement of the train as it rolled on, lulled her into fitful sleep. Her mind was tormented with pictures of Guerre threatening and torturing her, followed by the fancy that Mike had taken them and abandoned her to Guerre's cruelty. Richard with Muriel by his side floated into the dream. She awoke, crying. Dawn was creeping up, but now a pale dawn over a weak blue sky, and the marshes of Northern Georgia. Each hour she traveled brought her nearer to the sharp problem she feared. As the landscape became more dismal and vast, rolling hills of snow told her that she was in New Jersey. Fantine knew only a few hours kept her apart from Guerre and all their meeting

would mean. To an older mind there might be no reason why she should have to see Guerre, but Fantine knew that in order to break away from the influence he held over her and to extricate herself from his revenge, it was necessary to meet him and clear herself of the responsibility he had forced on her.

A sharp blast of the cold winter winds of New York whipped the color to her pale cheeks as she dismissed a taxi-cab three blocks from her destination, and, with the old caution instilled by her city associates, walked through the high dirt covered banks of snow piled in the gutters of East Thirty-Third Street.

The heavy step of Guerre as he descended the stairs to open the front door asserted to her listening ears that he was at home.

Surprise and anger shone on Guerre's face as she entered the hall.

"Well," he exclaimed gruffly, "Why didn't you wait for me to wire you?"

Fantine led the way to his room in silence wondering where she would ever get the

courage to tell him about the disappearance of the jewelry.

"A pretty mess you've come back to," spoke Handsome Mike as she entered the old familiar room on the top floor.

"Go on, now!" chirped Bennie with a nervous twitch of his shoulder, "Tell her! Cut out the stallin'!"

The atmosphere was constrained. Something had happened. Fantine looked at Guerre. She noted that he was anxious, nervous, some of his old bravado was gone. To her observation it seemed as if he had carried through an undertaking of which he dreaded the consequences. Maybe, she thought, it would be well to let him believe for a while that she had deposited the jewels in a safety vault upon her arrival in New York.

"Say, Guerre! Why don't you tell the kid Martin Stanborn's got her mother prisoner in his home."

"Oh!" exclaimed Fantine, recalling Guerre's promise to her.

"That's why Papa Guerre hurried back. She's safe now,—you can't scare me!"

"Is that so! And we've got Martin Stanborn in the cellar at Chinese Joe's!"

"Listen, Fantine," Guerre interrupted, "When we got back your mother was still absent from home. We laid low and watched our chance to enter Stanborn's house. This we finally accomplished. When we were sure he was at his office, the chauffeur and butler gone out, only the cook left in the kitchen, we broke in. I located Rosalie a prisoner on the top floor. Through the heavy door I couldn't bust, we had a confab. She told me Martin Stanborn wanted her to tell him where you were and to promise to take you out of New York, to separate you from his son. As I started down the stairs the old man was just entering—let himself in with a key. Concealed behind the library curtains, Mike saw him pass up the steps. I let him walk half way up and then I felled him. Only my blackjack once across his head. He had no time to cry or call for help. We bundled him into the Ford. Took him to Chinese Joe's."

Fantine's hand was raised to her mouth as she stifled an exclamation of horror and surprise.

"We need you at eight. Meet us here. Or, better still, at Joe's, at nine. Here's where you come in handy. You'll go down and tell him that you are already married to his son. I'll tell you later what to do. Take off your coat and let me have that haul!"

Fantine thought hurriedly. The dreaded moment had come.

"Oh!" and Fantine drew her head high with some of her old childish importance. "Do you think I was simple enough to carry them around New York with me? I deposited them in a safety vault."

Guerre turned to Mike. "Now, Mike, what did I tell you? Fantine's got all the powerful brains of Avenel. That's how my old pal used to think ahead."

Mike looked at Fantine sharply. He had detected that she was lying.

"There, don't worry, Fantine," he spoke. "Maybe we'll all dance at your wedding when we've shown that millionaire that it's crooks like him makes crooks like us. If I was you I'd clear out!"

In a flash Fantine comprehended the double meaning of his remark. Mike knew

she had lost the jewels and was warning her to keep out of Guerre's power.

"I am going home," she proceeded. Then, indicating the stylish traveling suit she had on, continued: "Papa Guerre, can I take some old togs with me?"

"For tonight?" Guerre questioned. Fantine flashed a smile nodding assent. Out of the closet she dragged a short plaid skirt, an old-fashioned, full sleeved yellow jacket and a worn tam-o-shanter.

Guerre watched her, as she turned to leave, with a look of adoration in his eyes. Later he would compliment her and tell her how well she had done; also give her the old keepsake revolver of her father, Leon, which he had treasured for so many years.

When Fantine reached Commerce Street she hurried up the narrow stairs to her small flat. How dusty and barren the place seemed without her mother's presence! Palm Beach and her journey there were almost a dream in which only the memory of Richard seemed real. If Richard did not love her there was always left to color her life the glory of having loved him. Fantine was de-

terminated. She knew just what she was about to do. She must lose no time, for at six o'clock Chinese Joe's would be crowded, and she must get there without delay. Later, when it was all over, and her mother free, they would move to a smaller town, where she could find honest work, separated forever from Guerre.

Fantine wiped the dust from the mirror over the mantelpiece and studied herself. The worn tam-o-shanter and old yellow coat conveyed the effect that she wished to create. She drew in her chest and rounded her shoulders; pulled her hair low over her eyes and drew down her lips in a discontented pout. No one who had seen her in Palm Beach would possibly recognize her. She looked the typical, forlorn girl of the Bowery. But the girls she had seen always had such brilliant red lips. She wished she had a lipstick. Well, what matter? She was off!

Locking the door after her, she descended the narrow, turning stairway. Her eyes observed the metal strips that covered the oil-cloth on the stairs and she wondered how she could ever have been so ignorant as to

think that this was a fitting residence to which Richard could accompany her.

Her small figure flitted through the drifts of snow, and under the leaden sky she made her way from the West to the East Side, taking one street car after another in an effort to reach Chinatown quickly, and walking from block to block between the infrequent car tracks. From the Bowery she turned into Pell Street and hurried past the old Chinese Theatre, now turned into a Mission House. No women were to be seen on the street, and in the twilight a few hurrying Chinamen in American cut clothes glided in and out of doors silently. At the door of Chinese Joe's she paused. This was the hour best to fit in with her plans. But what if Chinese Joe should fail to believe her? She pushed the door open.

"Hey, there, Joe!" she called in the deserted room. From a small side room the Chinaman appeared. Immediately she recognized Joe by his cumbersome frame. Bennie had often described him. The sparkle in the Chinaman's eyes gleamed brighter as he hur-

ried towards her, already reckoning the gain he might coin from her youth.

"Say, Joe, my father, Guerre, told me to come to you," she spoke. The Chinaman looked at her suspiciously.

"Yo' fader no say-ee noting to me. He no say-ee he got girl."

"Too wise to your old tricks!"

"Whad he send yo' here for?"

"He says I must speak to you alone." Fantine brandished her arms wide, indicating the side room at the left, striking the Chinaman across the breast as she did so, adding:

"Let's go in there."

"No time. I bus-ee!" added Joe.

"Oh! Is that so?" and Fantine beamed at him. Tiptoeing up to the Chinaman, she whispered low, but loud enough to scare him:

"In your basement you have a man, an old man, and my father says I must see him at once."

"No so loud. No so loud." Joe was fearful that someone might enter and overhear Fantine.

"No key. Yo' fader got key."

"Hurry up and pull out the other key you have in your pocket. Fantine brandished her arms again, striking the Chinaman across the chest.

"Why you want see man?"

She drew up her head, crowned by the red tam-o-shanter, and pirouetted before him in the yellow coat.

"My father says I am to go down and torment him." Then, once more tiptoeing up to Joe, she added: "He has lots of money."

Fantine felt certain he had felt the close proximity of her warm femininity. Drawing away from him, she continued:

"Maybe you are soft-hearted and let him go. That's why you won't let me go in the cellar.

"He no get away. No windows."

"Ah, come, now. How do you keep him alive? How does he get air?"

"Trap door open on back room. Back room open on kitchen. Kitchen have window." A gleam of passion swam in Joe's eyes.

"Aw, go on. Show me the way."

Doubtfully Joe stepped into the side room and pointed to the back room.

"I wait. You come back." And Joe handed Fantine the key.

"Yes, you wait for me." She smiled brightly back at him. She entered the back room. A musty odor from the cellar nearly staggered her as she looked down into the darkness below. Gradually her eyes became accustomed to the darkness. Stealthily she crept towards the dark figure in a receding corner. Softly she called:

"Mr. Stanborn?"

Even in the dim light Stanborn recognized her. She was the girl he had sworn to part from his son and against whom he had turned all his bitterness. She was the one who, during his thirty-six hours of solitude, he seemed to have fancied hearing his dead wife Eleanor plead to him to befriend.

"You?" he spoke tremulously. "Have you come to torment me?"

"You have my mother in your home. You are a horrid, cruel man! You think you love Richard, but you try to boss him all the time.

What do you mean by keeping my mother locked up in your house?"

"Child!" Martin Stanborn stretched his arms pleadingly toward her. "Through my imprisonment I have wondered. This is my punishment."

"Well, you ought to know better." And then, suddenly, Fantine realized that this old man was Richard's father; that Richard must love him even as she did her own father. It was all wrong of Guerre to keep him prisoner. She would set him free. This was the right thing to do. There was no hesitancy in her decision.

A glorified expression came over her face as she approached the old man and, putting her hand into his, said: "Are you strong enough to follow me up the stepladder? I'll walk on and leave you. You wait concealed below the trap door. When you hear me scream, go right through the back room into the kitchen. Then go out through the restaurant into Pell Street. Take your time and don't mind the cook. I'll take care of Joe. When you reach the street beat it down the alley past the old Mission House."

Silently wondering, Martin Stanborn, dreading some new trap awaiting him, listened for Fantine's call of warning. She had shut the trap door down over his head. He pushed it slightly upward and ascertained that it was open. Evidently she had not come to offer him freedom but only to make him realize more keenly that he was a prisoner. Fantine's weak cry reached his ears. He pushed up the trap door and stepped through the back room into the kitchen, where two thin Chinamen were busy, one at a big stove and one at a big table on the far side of the room under a rack of cooked meats and freshly cleaned chickens. The cooks looked up with curious eyes, but Martin Stanborn walked on, assuming the air of an inspector, undisturbed.

Someone had dropped a nickel in the electric piano. It was whirring and beating out a jangling piece of ragtime as Stanborn passed through the restaurant and out into the street.

A cold wind penetrated the dampness of his clothes. He shivered slightly as he walked on. He had about reached the Mission House

when a small figure came panting after him.

"Duck into the alley," Fantine called. "He's coming after me." They darted through the alley and around the corner towards the elevated car tracks at Chatham Square. Fantine had lost her tam-o-shanter; her hair was in disorder and tumbled prettily about her face. She smiled up at Martin Stanborn and spoke:

"I wonder what Chinese Joe thinks of me now? No windows in the cellar, but there was one in the side room. I screamed. That was your warning. I made believe I was fainting in his arms and let him hug me. That was the best way to make certain he wouldn't see you when you passed through the dining room. But I came to life mighty quick when he went for that brandy! I smashed a chair through the window and jumped out after it! It's a blessing I wasn't cut. It will cost Joe a new window. But, oh, wait until he finds out that you are gone and tells Guerre!"

Under the covered entrance of Chatham Square elevated station Martin Stanborn observed her. She seemed to him the most

self-reliant little thing he had ever met. He wondered that he could have ever doubted her honesty.

"You are a strange child," Martin Stanborn smiled at her, "yet a beautiful girl."

Then, just as Richard had been before, he felt himself suddenly interested in Fantine.

"Get into that street car and hurry home," she smiled at him. "One good deed deserves another. See that my mother——"

Already Stanborn had hailed a taxicab near the corner.

"That's all right for you!" Fantine spoke, "but send my mother home in your limousine. "I don't like taxi drivers. Sometimes they are careless." She climbed to the top of a pile of snow. The short skirt was up to her knees and the tangled hair down her back, unconcerned by the cold wind that swept through the iron tiers of the car tracks. From this perch she looked down imperiously on Martin Stanborn.

"I'll take you home first," he suggested.

Fantine recalled the brass strips and oil-cloth of the stairway to her home. "Oh, no," she answered. "We part ways here. I'll go

home and wait for my mother. Send her back like the real lady she is. And don't forget. In your car." Then, with a flash of her old spirit gleaming from her eyes: "Give my love to Richard, and my compliments."

Martin Stanborn caught a last glimpse of her through the taxi-cab window, as she jumped from the mound of snow and flitted swift-footed across the icy pavement, making her way through the poorly clad men and women and entering a jammed surface car.

CHAPTER XX.

Anxiously Fantine walked the short length of her apartment. It was now ten thirty. Martin Stanborn had not kept his word. Her mother had not returned home. She had thoroughly dusted the rooms, rearranged the furniture and tidied the small belongings on the mantelpiece. She had combed her hair and put on one of the pretty silk dresses Rosalie had made her. She had not returned to Chinatown nor had she met Guerre. With all her heart she wished she had not taken it upon herself to assist Martin Stanborn. She dreaded the consequences. She recalled that he had never promised to free her mother, and that she had taken this action on his part for granted. Bitterly she regretted her impulsiveness that had set Martin Stanborn at liberty. How simple, how foolish to put her trust in the father of a man who had lacked the courage to defend her when she had been slandered. How childish she had

been to believe that Richard had ever loved her! Or that she could raise herself to meet the requirements of his environment. An unsurmountable wall surrounded her which she could not climb nor could Richard step over. It was just as Guerre had told her. She was a daughter of the underworld. There she belonged, there she must stay and die.

Tears filled her eyes. Anger lifted her bosom in short breaths. She wished she had questioned Guerre and ascertained where Martin Stanborn lived. As it was, she was powerless. She did not know where her mother was hidden. What would Guerre do when he found out that the jewels were gone? There wasn't a chance for her in the world! She wished she was dead. She threw herself on an old velvet couch and wept bitterly.

She had only longed to do the right thing. Was it because of her father she was doomed forever to express the dishonest deeds he had furthered? Was she tied by a bond as Guerre had told her to carry on his spirit of adventure? Oh, how she wished that she

could be in the open by the sea just as she had been at Palm Beach after that frightful night! How wonderful had been the dawn and how it had thrilled her with a new purpose! A desire to cling to the truth had controlled her. She had decided to return the jewels only to find them gone. She heard a noise in the hallway. Lifting her head she cried:

“Mother!” But it was Guerre who opened the door and entered the apartment.

The Frenchman’s face was distorted in anger, flushed scarlet with unrestrained passion. In the six months of their acquaintance Fantine had never seen him betray such complete abandon to evil. Without speaking a word he crossed to her side. Trembling, Fantine shrank back on the couch, fearful before the avalanche of his uncontrolled anger.

“Did you, you little sneak, dare to oppose me?” And Guerre hauled her by the shoulder, lifting her to her feet. With all the power of his clenched hands he shook her as if she had been a rag doll, violently, without mercy.

"Did you go to Chinese Joe's and free that scoundrel?" he yelled.

"I was only thinking of mother. Once freed I thought he would send my mother back to me."

"You little ninny!" And Guerre swung his arm twice through the intervening space and brought a full blow against her. Fantine staggered across the room.

"We'll have to clear out of New York. He'll be down on us with the full power of the law. In what safety vault did you place the jewels?"

Fantine grew icy with fear. The moment she dreaded had arrived. She must tell Guerre, but how? Her throat was parched and dry. The words seemed to stick there. They would not come.

"Come! Come!" Guerre pulled her angrily towards the center of the room. "Speak! Where are they?"

"When I returned to my hotel the box in which I had placed them had been opened." Her voice was mellow with emotion. "The detectives were there. Someone had taken them."

Livid with rage Guerre towered his full height above her. He lurched at her, infuriated. "Damn you, you little idiot! I'll thrash you within an inch of your life!"

Fantine darted across the room. Guerre staggered heavily after her. She attempted to reach the door. He barred the way with his body. Fantine crept back towards the couch. Slowly Guerre neared her side and with a cry of rage closed his hand on her slim shoulder, growling: "I've got you! I'll show you! You! The daughter of an Apache? You, the daughter of a man of courage? It's just as Mike said: You're a white livered coward."

The same glorified expression that had lit Fantine's face earlier in the evening when she had liberated Martin Stanborn flashed again. Something within her heart seemed suddenly to find a voice, to awaken into song, to tell her that she was not a coward. Knowing not whence she was gathering this courage, Fantine faced Guerre with every bit of determination her tense body possessed and spoke fearlessly.

"Guerre, when I first met you I seemed to

love danger, more than I did life itself, but when it came to the point that I was to steal and carry out your wishes, some power outside, that I cannot explain, came to guide me. It was almost as if I heard God's voice telling me to be honest! And there—"she steeled herself for this last blow which she felt certain was the greatest she could inflict—"If you must know it, I never stole that jewelry. Call it what you will. Say that I lacked the courage, but I am glad I failed you!—I am glad I followed the voice!"

Fantine's face was beautiful as she spoke these words—beautiful in her new found expression of right for love's sake. But Guerre had no eyes for her beauty.

"The devil take you!" he cursed. "I'll kill you!" His powerful voice vibrated through the room. It seemed to deafen her. His eyes scintillated red lights. They were the eyes of a mad man. This time Fantine realized that there would be no saying what he would do if his hands closed on her throat. She ran through the hallway of her flat. The beast was after her.

In the darkness of the hallway she felt his hand reach for her; felt his hot breath on her cheek; was conscious of the sweat that poured from his forehead. She lowered her body to the floor. Guerre missed her and with a frightful curse once more was after her. She sprang to her feet now, her hand on the door knob. He was close behind her. Headlong down the narrow ill-lit hall she rushed. She staggered blindly into a man. Suddenly her strength gave way. She clung to the newcomer in despair.

"Help me! Help me!" she pleaded. "He's going to kill me! He knows that I never stole the jewels!"

A strong arm encircled her waist tenderly and gave her support, a strong voice spoke:

"Not while I'm here, dearest!" And Richard Stanborn whipped out his revolver and covered the now cowed Guerre, backing him step by step into the apartment once more.

Following Richard, Martin Stanborn and Dare Kennedy entered. "Hands up, my man." And while Richard leveled his revolver Dare Kennedy searched Guerre.

Around Fantine's trembling shoulders Martin Stanborn lovingly placed an arm.

"Well, little girl, we just came in time, eh?" the silver-haired financier spoke.

"Where is mother?" she questioned.

"She is safe, dear child. We will take you to her in a few minutes. Kennedy, I recognize the fellow. He is the one who was coming down the stairs and attacked me. You have my sworn warrant for assault."

"Yes, sir," answered the detective.

"Then arrest him."

"Oh please," begged Fantine. "Please let him go! He was angry at me because I lost the jewels!"

"I have them, my child, and tomorrow they shall be returned to the rightful owner," Martin Stanborn said.

She was about to speak, but Richard caught her eyes and pointed to Kennedy. Stanborn directed his attention to Guerre once more.

"We are going to place you, my man, where you cannot exercise your evil influence and destroy the purity of innocence. I shudder when I think what this child might

have become in your hands—unless she had been fortunate in the love of a pure mother. Go on.

Guerre was about to leap at Kennedy in a sudden dash for freedom when Fantine stepped between them.

“Please! Please!” she spoke. “He loved my father! He loved me! Can’t you set him free?”

Martin Stanborn’s brow furrowed in thought.

“There, my child. We will only hold him in custody for a few days, until we can ship him back to his own country. I shall not appear in court against him.”

Kennedy made ready to slip the hand cuffs on Guerre but with a flash of the old Apache pride Guerre spoke for the first time since his pursuers had entered the room.

“The only being that brought me to America—that I loved—has gone out of my life forever. I am not going to run away. I shall be glad to depart for France.” Slowly he made for the door.

“Papa Guerre, Papa Guerre!” Fantine cried. “I—I loved you.”

"I was wrong, ma petite." Guerre kissed her brow gently.

"Rosalie had you in her care too long!"

"Come on," spoke Kennedy. Fantine listened without a word to Guerre's step as it died on the descending stairway.

Martin Stanborn cleared his throat. "A-hem—Richard, my boy! I will be waiting for you in the car. Don't keep me too long—children." And he closed the door of the apartment as he departed.

Alone Richard and Fantine faced each other in silence. Then Richard opened his arms wide and Fantine nestled into his embrace.

"Darling," he whispered. "My own! Did you think I had abandoned you in Palm Beach to the mercy of Kennedy?"

"But the jewels? Who took them? How did your father get them?"

Richard smiled into her eyes. Suddenly Fantine understood. It was he who had taken the jewels. It was he who had protected her from implication in the robbery.

"Was it you who took the necklace?"

Richard laughed and nodded his head.

"When you found them didn't you think that I—"

"Hush!" And Richard placed a finger lightly on her lip. "I know better."

"If you only knew how near I came to doing it!"

"No, my darling. Not you! You are a thoroughbred. I read this in your eyes the first time I met you. And a thoroughbred never stoops, but lifts higher along the path all he meets. You darling." And Richard kissed her tenderly.

Fantine's whole body trembled with his kiss. Her eyes were like stars that speak their fulfillment in the joy of just gleaming.

"Hurry, dear, get into your wrap. Your mother is anxious to see you."

"Then you've met my mother." Softly she added, "Richard!"

"Yes, when I returned from the club and tried to tell Dad about the jewels I could hardly get him to listen, so lost were he and your mother in plans for our future."

With a happy laugh Fantine flitted to a rear room of the apartment. Richard followed her and paused in the doorway of her

bedroom—a small room white painted and with white coverlet neatly drawn, its single window curtained in white.

“How perfect! How clean!” he declared. “It’s just the kind of a little room I always fancied you had.”

Fantine knew that her dream had been fulfilled. Richard had come to claim her right in her own home, just as she had fancied he would when she had decided to change her life and part from Guerre. Once more, before Fantine had extinguished the gas, Richard, conscious of the picture she made in her inexpensive coat, its small fur collar fastened tightly around her throat, her pretty face alight with joy, thrilled with the wonder of her. He held her close to him and kissed reverently in turn her marvelous eyes.

“Well, daughter,” Martin Stanborn spoke as she entered his limousine. “Your mother is a wonderful woman, and there is a streak of true blood in your veins. She told me how she brought you from Flanders when you were a little child after your father’s death. She is a good woman, but oh,—what a spirit you have!”

"I get it from my father," Fantine spoke proudly.

"Richard, my son, I must tell you. This little girl climbed down a dark cellar and broke through a window and—and—"

Two weeks later Rosalie's trembling fingers fastened the soft bridal veil that framed Fantine's happy face.

"Mrs. Richard Stanborn," she whispered, "Oh, my little one! Love your husband as I did your father!"

Fantine beamingly returned the caress.

Later, her slender body wrapped comfortably in a soft, gray squirrel coat, Fantine sat back contentedly as Richard tucked a warm bearskin rug over her feet. She waved a little gloved hand in parting adieu to her mother and Martin Stanborn. Richard, at the wheel of his racer, smiled lovingly at Fantine. Together they sped towards the Pennsylvania station.

Once more Fantine was to see Palm Beach, but this time as Richard's bride.

The late sunlight that lay across the heavily trafficked thoroughfare gleamed on the sparkling Renaissance building at Herald

Square and its sinking rays enveloped them as they turned a corner and disappeared down Broadway.

